

The American Dream..
Charles Wahler "The Bastogne Kid"
Fights for His New Country



The "Bastogne Kid"
Bastogne
Dec. 27, 1944

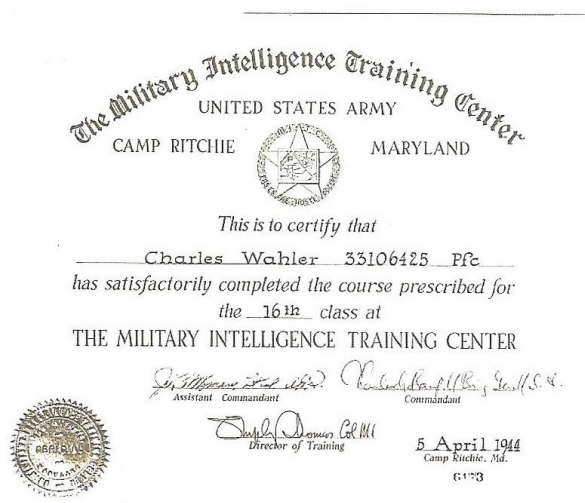
I've been collecting, buying and selling military artifacts for over 50 years and, on many occasions have wondered "How can there be anything left out there to find?" By 2015, the youngest GI who enlisted at the age of 17 would be at least 87 years of age. So simply and sadly, from a mathematic and statistical standpoint, the vast majority of the 16.1 million Americans who served in WWII have passed. I read one estimate that, based on a 2014 survey, said there were approximately 492 WWII veterans dying each day, with the number who are still alive at around 1,000,000.

Charles Wahler was one of these veterans who served his country with pride. He passed away, in 1991, in his middle 70's. However, he certainly left behind quite a legacy! Fortunately an astute team of two antique dealers were selected to clean out his home in 2014. The home had been left empty since 1991 and, as unbelievable as it may seem, the house was left undisturbed. The antique dealers told me that, if they had not been selected for the clean out, there was a distinct chance that all the items you will read about would literally have been tossed into a dumpster.

First, let's talk about the man. Charles Wahler was born in 1914 to Jewish parents in Austria. Both of his parents had lived in the U.S. and had become citizens. At some point, they returned to Austria. It was here that Charles spent his first 24 years. He watched as times in Austria became turbulent and, being Jewish, became more and more dangerous.

The annexation of Austria by Germany in March of 1938 must have been a turning point for his family. They decided it was time to leave and, on October 8th, 1938 booked passage on the SS Koenigstein out of Antwerp, Belgium. They arrived in NYC on October 21st. Less than three weeks later, Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) took place and so, in many ways, their departure was fortunate.

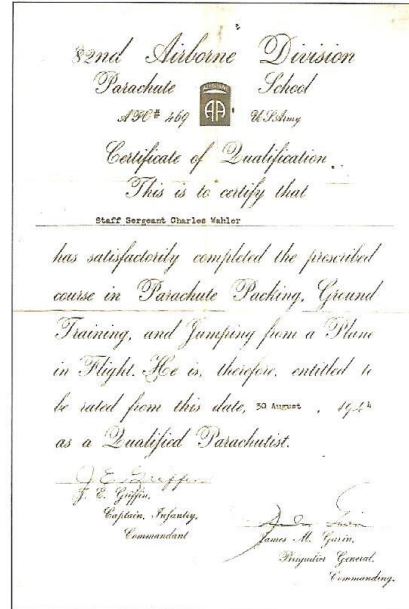
Because Charles' parents were citizens, he was automatically a naturalized citizen. He wasted no time in adapting to and adopting his new country. In fact he was anxious to serve his country and enlisted in the army on November 26th, 1941, which was just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Perhaps he had a sense that something was going to happen and he wanted to be a part of it. He completed basic and advanced training with his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) as an infantryman.



However, because of his many talents and his ability to speak German, Uncle Sam had other ideas in store for him. A friend said that Charles spoke English well but with a heavy Austrian accent. In April 1944, he was sent for Military Intelligence Training and soon after he was shipped over to England. He arrived in time to participate in the Normandy invasion but was shipped back to England to attend jump school, which he completed in August of 1944.

His adventures were just beginning as he was now assigned to the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) of the 101st Airborne Division. He made his first combat jump during Operation Market Garden into Holland. Here, the skills he picked up during intelligence school combined with his linguistic abilities were put to use interrogating POW's including SS men. He also spent time translating documents.

During this time he wrote a letter virtually every day to his loving parents. They, in turn, were also communicating regularly. Salvaged from his home were over 500 letters, most of which are in English but some in Austrian. Of course, some of these are censored and a few have lines blacked out and sections cut out. However, you certainly get the sense that Charles is in the thick of things.



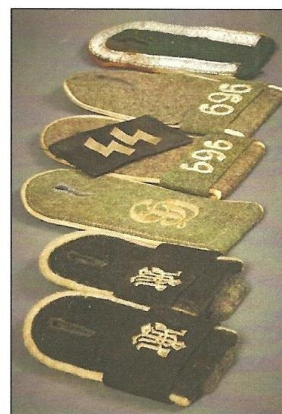
IPW Team 9 - HQ, 7th Army, by 101 Abn Div
 Capt **WERNER J MEIER** 01321275 Inf
 2nd Lt **MARTIN YOUNG** 01185897 PA
 M/Sgt Charles Wahler 33106425
 S/Sgt **Alfred Schwartz** 39564665
 Tec 3 Thomas S Harvey 35050336
 Tec 5 Werner T Simon 35535152

Sgt. Wahler (eventually Master Sargent) was assigned to IPW team #9 (Interrogation Prisoners of War) during the Battle of the Bulge. He is mentioned more than once in the book, "NO VICTORY IN VALHALLA" by Ian Gardner, where he is fully involved in interrogating German prisoners of war. That's right, not many people know that even during this very scary, last ditch effort, all out assault by over 200,00 German troops representing over twenty divisions, we took prisoners.

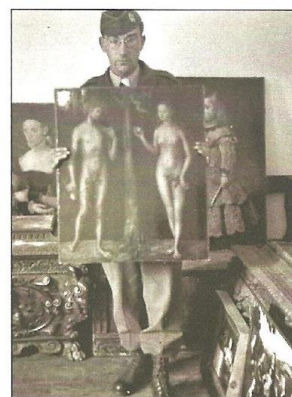


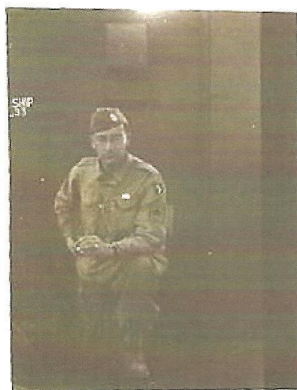
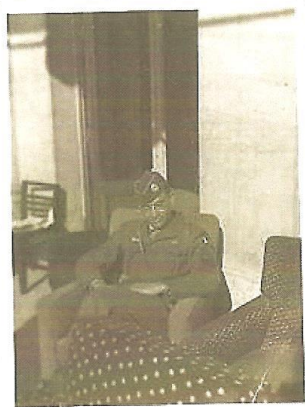
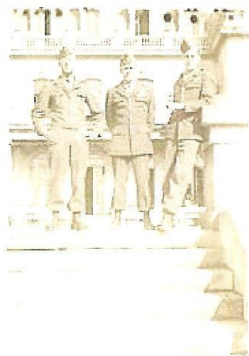
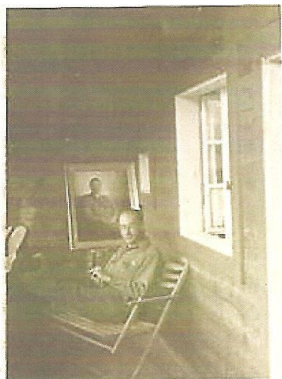
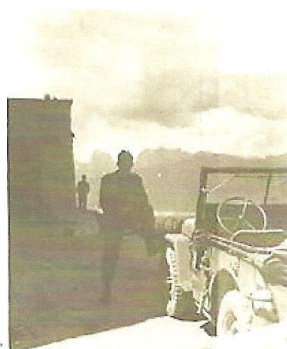
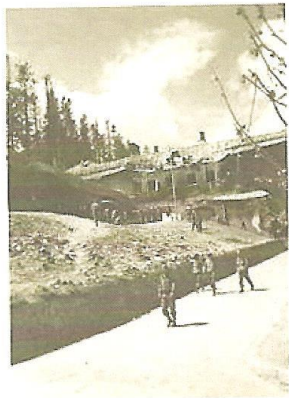
These POW's had valuable intelligence and Charles Wahler was very successful in extracting this information. He also had a taste for souvenirs and he liberated many pieces of insignia and cufftitles from these POWs.

They were probably not in a position to argue with him. All the members of his team were given 5 points on their service record for their efforts. This would prove to be very important regarding who went home and who stayed after the war because a soldier needed 85 points total to earn a ticket back to the U.S.



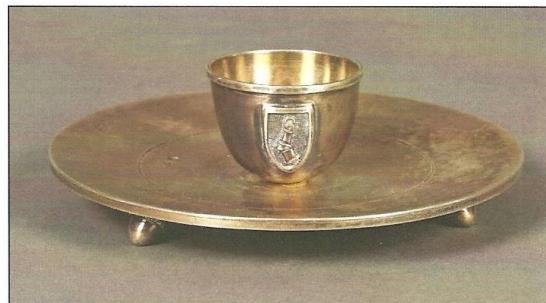
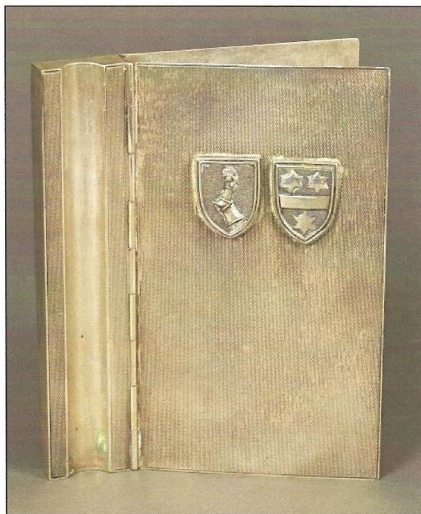
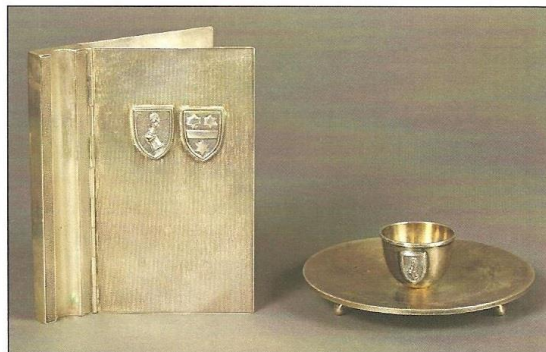
He continued to serve with the 501st and made his way to Berchtesgaden just as the war in Europe is ending. Here he assisted with the setting up of the world famous Hermann Göring Art Collection at Unterstein in Bavaria. Fortunately a number of negatives were found with this incredible cache and they show Wahler handling some priceless pieces of artwork. We have had these developed and here are a few to share with you. These pictures have now been sent to THE MONUMENTS MEN author Robert Edsel.





He also has the opportunity to search through other important landmarks, including the Berghof, the Eagle's Nest and Göring's once beautiful but now wrecked home on the mountain. This is where he took the biggest prizes of all. In addition to calling cards and who knows what else, he liberated what we believe are two very significant pieces from a very important event in Göring's life. That was the christening of his one and only child, Edda. She was born on June 2, 1938 and baptized on November 4th at Göring's lavish estate called Carinhall. Adolf Hitler was her godfather. Very special guests were invited to this event including Göring's personal secretary, Ursula Grundtmann, who later married Luftwaffe Ace Oberstleutnant Hans-Gunter Kornatzki, later KIA on Sept 12, 1944. The Göring's must have presented the guest with gifts as one of the spoils snagged by Charles Wahler from Göring's home was, of all things, an elaborate silver egg cup with Ursula's name and the date beautifully engraved on the bottom. The side of the cup has the coat of arms for both Hermann and his wife, Emmy. It is marked 835 silver and bears the Zeitner logo.

In addition to this, there is an interesting piece which is a book cove/ holder which I am certain was what held the actual guest book for those that attended this very important event. There is even a recess on the side which held a pen for the convenience of the guests. It is small in stature, measuring approximately 5 x 7 inches, but to me it is of mammoth importance. It is 835 silver marked with the maker's touchmarks.

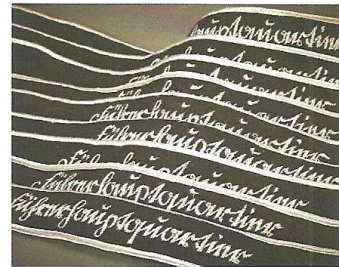


An ironic side note is a 1942 article which appeared in an Australian newspaper stating that Göring had his secretary murdered because she had revealed confidential information regarding his finances. The story was based on a Moscow radio report so I'm not sure if we'll ever know whether this is true or perhaps some planted propaganda.

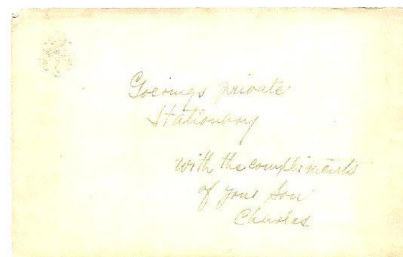
The West Australian (Perth, WA : 1879 - 1954) 3333 Wednesday, 28 August 1942

HIS INCOME REVEALED.
Goering Murders His Secretary.
 LONDON, Aug 25.—The Moscow radio, quoting a report from the frontier, says that Goering murdered his private secretary (Ursula von Kornatzki) as a result of revelation by Himmler that von Kornatzki divulged her employer's private income. Goering was furious and took immediate revenge.

In addition to other souvenirs, Wahler picked up a batch of rare unissued German army officer's cufftitles which were for the personal escort/protection detachment of The Führer. These men were part of the elite army unit "Grossdeutschland". These cufftitles are hand embroidered and read "Führerhauptquartier" in the sütterlin script. Essentially this translates to the "Führer Headquarters". According to the world renown expert on the 101st Airborne, Mark Bando, a large quantity of these were found in the Berchtesgaden area by the 501st PIR with whom Charles Wahler was serving.



There were many other interesting tidbits including insignia, cufftitles and paper items. This includes a series of booklets on the 1936 Olympics and a copy of Mein Kampf that Charles gathered up before he left this area. He went on to serve his country, with his next assignment being very important. He was assigned to translate a large number of documents that would be used in the Nuremberg Trials. Copies of these, as well as a tremendous amount of ephemera and much of Charles Wahler's US equipment is now safe and sound in the hands of a sincere and dedicated collector Eric Kaechelin. He was very instrumental in helping me secure this great lot. My good friend Paul Johnson also deserves a tip of my hat. Paul will be collaborating with me on my upcoming book entitled THE STORIES BEHIND THE TREASURES OF WORLD WAR II "The Making of a Collectorholic". It was he who first told me about this historical grouping.



In October 1945, Charles was honorably discharged from the service and returned home. He, like millions of other GI's, simply went back to his job working at the Philadelphia Daily Record. He gave one of his prized souvenirs to David Loeb who was the Business Manager at the Record.

I'm including a picture of Charles with his wife, Rudy, holding this souvenir, because it shows that sometimes even the GI's didn't know what they had. The caption identifies this staff car pennant as belonging to No. 2 NAZI Hermann Goering. It is, in fact, for an army general and not for the Luftwaffe's Reichsmarshal.



Speaking of Rudy, here is yet another side note regarding Charlie's personal life during this time. Just before he shipped overseas, he married a childhood friend turned sweetheart. In a newspaper interview after the war he mentioned that very few people were aware of the marriage. It appears this included his parents because there was a definite interlude in the daily correspondences from his parents that seemed to coincide with this time. We speculate that it took them time to adjust to this new development.

Charles and Rudy moved to Drexel Hill, PA and had one son that we are aware of. Walter was a Vietnam veteran and actually wrote to the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich in 1983 inquiring about the Göring silver pieces. There is no record if they ever wrote back.

Charles remained active with the veterans of the 4th Infantry Division and the 101st Airborne after the war. As we stated at the beginning, sadly he passed away in 1991. However, due to the smart work of antique dealers Kerry and Anne Serody, his treasures and memories will be perpetuated for many generations to come.

