

Respect for Jewish Historians

Mike Moskow is from Kingston, Pennsylvania. His father served in the military and Mike now lives in the Philadelphia area. Aside from Mike's marvelous interpersonal skills and human warmth, he is an impressive historian. With degrees in Library Science and Geology, one might mistake my friend for someone who knows more about rocks than about people. Quite to the contrary. He may know something about the formation of the natural world but, at the same time, he knows a lot about people.

Mike's particular interest is Jewish war veterans from World War II. His blogs entitled History at Random, The Past in the Present (<http://thepastpresented.com/>), Literally Art and Illustration – Images and Thoughts to Inspire Your Intellect and Infuse Your Imagination! – Words Envisioned (<http://wordsenvisioned.com/>), and Excursions in Jewish Military History and Jewish Genealogy (<http://theyweresoldiers.com/>) are must reading for anyone interested in Jewish history. It is filled with stories, messages and historical insight that cannot necessarily be garnered reading textbooks alone.

For example, there is Stanley H. Levine. He was from Hughesville, Pennsylvania, a tiny town east of the great metropolis of Williamsport. He escaped death in a plane crash August 8, year not given. He was a navigator on a B-29 Super Fortress and he later wrote to the Jewish Welfare Board that he was a member of the B-29 crew of the 5th Sq, 9th Bomb Gp., stationed on Tinian. "We were shot down on our 17th mission 8 Aug. 45." He related that the crew was captured by the Japanese, "the last B-29 crew to receive this fate." They were liberated from the POW camp by American forces on September 12th and flown back to the states.

Stanley Levine ended his letter by proudly noting that he was associated with his father in business in a shoe, clothing and lady's wear business on Main Street in Hughesville, Pennsylvania, and was a member of "my old reformed congregation – the Beth Ha Shalom Temple in Williamsport, Pa."

The blog abounds with stories which are frequently told through letters and pictures of the veterans themselves. No boring textbook this, but rather we see pictures of the Nip Clipper with a large picture of Daffy Duck running with his hatchet.

Another photo which caught my attention given current attitudes concerning labels is a picture of one of the hottest World War II airplanes of all time, a twin engine attack bomber with the words largely emblazoned on one engine saying: "JEW BOY." This was clearly not considered an affront, but rather written on the engine by one of the Jewish crew members.

Few people realize that Major David I. Cedarbaum of the United States Army served as Chaplain with the 20th Air Force in the Marianas Islands during World War II. The article posted by Mike Moskow notes that an essential component of Major Cedarbaum's military service was to record and preserve information about Jewish military service in the 20th Airforce.

The David I. Cedarbaum Papers at the Center for Jewish History is a treasure-trove of documents and photographs. Thanks to Mike Moskow's work, we are informed about the material, its location and we are provided with a link.

As a younger lawyer, I represented a man named Mitch Harrison who was originally from Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania. He gave me a picture showing a bunch of young men on a basketball team. He told me that there were enough Jews living in Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania to have an all-Jewish intermural basketball team representing the Jewish Community from Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania. Insofar as I know now, there are virtually no Jews living in that community.

Mitch proudly told me that he fought at the Battle of Bulge. We got to talking about the food that was available and I asked him if he ever ate pork during those difficult days. He said one time he was told by the Chaplain that it was okay to eat pork, in order to survive. He said that he took the can, removed the top, closed his eyes and tried to eat a piece of pork but he immediately choked on it and almost died from it, rather than from "Kraut" bullets. Mitch took that as a sign from above, and said that he never tried to eat pork again.

I doubt that Mitch's story is recorded anywhere, but Mike Moskow's blog does a great job of restoring and reminding us of the significant contribution made by the Jewish community during World War II.

There have been some excellent movies and documentaries about African Americans in World War II, extoling the justified virtues of the Tuskegee Airmen and Black tank battalions. However, less is known about the contribution of Jewish Americans to the war effort. My Uncle Phil, for example, lied about his age, he was not yet 18, to get into the United States Air Force and train as a pilot in Pensacola, Florida. My Uncle Bob was one of the soldiers who stormed the Normandy beaches and helped to rescue Jews in hiding throughout France. Recently, Bob's best buddy from World War II, a man well into his 90s, sent me a chapter of a book that he wrote about his World War II experiences. He talked about his friend Bob, who on the first night of Rosh Hashanah after the French liberation, took him to the Grand Synagogue in Paris. Bob did not like the enormous edifice and the second night they went to a basement shtetl, which was more to the liking of Bob Rieders. "Bob helped to remind me how important celebration of the Jewish holidays were in the wake of French liberation."

Thanks to Mike Moskow's blog and his extremely well-grounded sources, this history is available to us and is must reading for anybody who cares about the Jewish community and its historical connection with World War II.

Not to be forgotten in my family is my mother's story about how her boyfriend, or perhaps even fiancé, was a medic in World War II and killed on the battlefield. We sometimes forget how many Jews served in that great conflict and died forgotten in Europe and the Pacific Theater. Our people have been fighting on behalf of the United States of America since before the Revolutionary conflict. One of my wife's ancestors, according to the Jewish Museum in Philadelphia, fought along with other Jews under the command of General Washington. He was a member of the Pennsylvania Militia, which were essentially "drafted" to fight before the Continental Army was well

organized. He served and went back to Lancaster, Pennsylvania where he became what in those days was known as a “permanent juror.” Once upon a time, people could only be chosen as jurors if they had certain attributes of respectability and actually knew the parties involved in the claim.

If you have not had an opportunity to look at Mike Moskow’s blog, I urge anyone who is curious, thoughtful or just wants to have knowledge about Jewish war veterans, heroes and plain old contributors to the American dream, to check out Mike Moskow’s blog.

CAR/srb

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