

This Week in Saratoga County History

WWII 27th Division veteran passes away at 100

Submitted by Christopher Carola May 22,2024

Christopher Carola is a former Albany-based Associated Press reporter who has interviewed many area World War II veterans in his research of the impact of the war on local families.



Wilfred 'Spike' Mailloux (middle)

Wilfred L. “Spike” Mailloux, a World War II combat veteran I had befriended after interviewing him for an Associated Press story a decade ago, died on May 2 in the Albany-area nursing home where he was living in the room next door to Jean Mailloux, his wife of 77 years. He was 100 years old. The Maillouxes lived for a number of years in the town of Halfmoon.

In addition to being among the nation’s dwindling number of WWII veterans, Spike Mailloux was one of the oldest known veterans of the New York Army National Guard, as well as one of the last surviving U.S. Army veterans of the Battle of Saipan, fought June 15-July 9, 1944. And he very likely may have been the last of the American survivors of the attack launched at dawn by the Japanese on July 7, 1944, in what’s considered the largest “banzai” charge of the war.

I first met Spike in the summer of 2014 at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, where he and his best friend John Sidur were attending a talk on the Battle of Saipan, where the Army’s 27th Infantry Division fought alongside two Marine Corps divisions.

When I approached Spike and asked if I could ask him a few questions about Saipan, he said the only time he talked with strangers about the battle was when John Sidur was standing by his side.

It was Sidur, then a 26-year-old staff sergeant, who saved Spike's life after finding the then-20-year-old corporal lying in a watery ditch, bleeding from a stab wound to his thigh inflicted by a knife-wielding Japanese officer.

"He found me in the mud," Spike told me for that Associated Press story, which moved the global news agency's national and international wires on July 7, 2014, the 70th anniversary of the banzai charge that sent an estimated 5,000-plus Japanese against a thin front line manned by about 1,100 soldiers of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 27th Division's 105th Infantry Regiment.

When that daylong assault ended with some of the surviving Americans literally driven into the sea, more than 4,000 Japanese lay dead. The 105th was nearly wiped out, suffering 406 killed, 512 wounded and several missing in action.

Since the 27th Division was a New York National Guard organization federalized in 1940, the casualties from the July 7 attack included scores of New Yorkers, many of them from the Albany-Saratoga region. Two, Lt. Col. William O'Brien and Sgt. Thomas Baker, both from Troy, were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Spike was evacuated to a military hospital in Hawaii to recuperate. Sidur stayed with the 27th Division and fought at Okinawa, where he was wounded. After the war, both men returned to their hometown of Cohoes and landed jobs, got married and raised families.

Spike and John were best friends until Sidur passed away in January 2015, a week after his 97th birthday. With his passing Spike became the last of the original 96 men in Cohoes-based Company B of the 105th Regiment. Spike, a member of a local drum and bugle corps, was the company bugler – a real-life bugle boy of Company B.

Spike and I would meet every now and then for lunch, usually at the Halfmoon Diner, near where he and Jean were living at the time. His son, Bob, would drive him, and one or both of Spike's great-grandsons would join us.

At first, Spike didn't offer many details about Saipan, especially the banzai charge. Those horrific memories were still too traumatic to share, even 70-plus years later. Over time, he divulged more about his wartime experiences, although he tended to avoid talking about what happened on July 7, 1944.

While checking online records of the New York National Guard's 1940 roster, I noticed the birthday listed for Spike – Sept. 11, 1921 -- didn't add up to his age at the time I met him. He confessed: he had added two years to his age, making him the required minimum 18 so he could enlist and get the \$5 Guardsmen were paid when they showed up for weekend drills.

That money, he said, came in handy in a French Canadian family with 12 children and a father who worked two jobs to keep them fed.

I had two other occasions to include Spike in AP stories I wrote on the Saipan battle. One involved several hand-drawn portraits of fellow soldiers that a 27th Division member created in 1943 while they were training in Hawaii. After the artist veteran died, his son donated the collection to the NYS Military Museum, which was attempting to identify all the men depicted. Spike didn't recognize any of them, but he enjoyed his visit to the museum, home to a trove of artifacts, documents and photographs chronicling the 27th Division's WWII history.

The other story was about a new book whose author said he was inspired to write it after reading in my July 2014 AP story about how John Sidur saved a fellow soldier – Spike – from bleeding to death.

“If one person could be identified as the reason I wrote this book, John Sidur of Cohoes, New York, is that person,” Texas-based author Bill Sloan wrote at the end of his book, “Their Backs Against The Sea: The Battle of Saipan and the Largest Banzai Attack of World War II.”

The last time I saw Spike was on Sept. 11, 2023 – his 100th birthday – at the 76 Diner in Latham. Jean was there, along with son Bob and other family members spread out in several nearby booths.

When I walked up to him, he smiled and greeted me the way he always did: “There's my buddy.”

After Bob Mailloux informed me of his father's death, I passed the news along to the Times Union and WNYT-TV, which aired a story on Spike using photos I provided. The TU included information and images I provided in a May 7 front-page story published on the day of his burial. The headline: Real-life bugle boy from Company B, Cohoes native and Saipan survivor, dies at 100.

So long, Spike. Thanks for sharing your stories with me so I could share them with the world.

