

Christmas Story from WWII

Two years ago, I wrote an article on the Christmas Truce of WWI. In searching for other similar stories, I found something that was reported in the American Legion magazine and I verified it with other sources. This event took place during the Battle of the Bulge, one of the last German offensives during the war. It was during the Battle of the Bulge that General McAuliffe gave his wonderful response to a request from the Germans to surrender, he said NUTS.

During this battle three American soldiers, one of whom was wounded got lost in the snow-covered Ardennes forest. They walked, lost for three days searching for the US battle lines. On Christmas Eve, they stumbled on a small cabin in the woods. Inside the cabin, Elisabeth Vincken and her 12-year old son Fritz had been waiting for her husband, Hurbert to arrive home for Christmas. The family's home in Aachen, Germany had been destroyed and the family had taken refuge in the cabin near the Belgian border. Late in the evening, Elisabeth heard a knock on her door and when she opened it, there were the three US soldiers. Elisabeth invited them in and had the wounded soldier put on a bed. Since one of the soldiers spoke French as did Elisabeth, they were able to communicate. Elisabeth killed a chicken, roasted it and along with some potatoes, provided a meal for the soldiers. Suddenly there was another knock at the door and when the son, Fritz opened it, there were four German soldiers. "I was almost paralyzed with fear," Fritz would later recall, "for though I was a child, I knew that harsh law of war: Anyone giving aid and comfort to the enemy would be shot." Elisabeth confronted the German soldiers and told them they were welcome to come inside, get warm and eat the food until it was gone. She also told the Germans that there were others in the cabin who were lost American soldiers. She told the Germans that "It is Holy Night and there will be no shooting here." Elisabeth also required that both the American and German soldiers leave their weapons in a shed next to the cabin. When the food was ready, the Germans produced a bottle of wine and a loaf of bread. One of the Germans was a former medical student and tended to the wounded American. Following the meal, Elisabeth read from the Bible and declared that there would be at least one night of peace in this war. The next morning, the Germans gave the Americans directions back to their lines and the soldiers parted company, returning to their respective armies. Elisabeth and Hurbert remained in Germany following the war, Their son, Fritz migrated to the US and made his home in Hawaii, running a bakery as his father had in Germany. Following a television program *Unsolved Mysteries* about the story, Fritz was reunited with one of the US soldiers, Ralph Blank.