

## ***NAPTHS Newsletter Addition – January-May 2024***

**A special story by Society Member Douglas Brahler about his intriguing adventure in France during September 2023**

### **“FRENCH TRIPLETS FIND A FRIEND”**

They say a picture is worth a thousand words...But when I came across this vintage photograph a few years back, I thought there might be even more words than that behind this image. And as it turns out, this photograph kept my interest for nearly three years, and led me on a trek that would ultimately take me all the way across the Atlantic Ocean to the Cotentin Peninsula, in the Normandy region of France.

Being a history buff since my teens, and a lifelong collector of many different genres, my main interest has always lied in the history, artifacts, and war souvenirs from that immense and not so distant conflict known as World War II. The



countless war stories, the far-flung battlefields, the weapons of war, the seemingly unstoppable Axis invaders, the miracle of US production and logistics, and the heroics of fresh-faced American “GIs” -- the good, the bad, the ugly -- this period of world history had it all. In a devastating six-year period from 1939-1945, so much of the world fell into chaos and ultimately liberation, resulting in a remarkably changed world, with America looked upon as the shining example of what could be.

**THE PHOTOGRAPH:** Always having an affinity for original photographs from the WWII war years, such items remained long after the war was over, not only as tangible artifacts, but more importantly as a “snapshot” of one particular moment in time. Although many of the participants from that time period have now passed or are quite aged, I was always intrigued by such original photos, which served as visual reminders of what took place, who was involved, and maybe even conveyed some hint of emotion of those portrayed.

While usually fascinated with images of planes, or tanks, or soldiers in combat action, this unique image intrigued me. A typical, well-equipped GI (“Government-Issue,” slang for the many rank-and-file enlisted men who filled the US armed forces), and three small girls, one looking through a pair of binoculars clearly belonging to the soldier at hand. The expressions of all pictured were priceless, and seemed to be lighthearted compared to what was going on in Europe during those dark days of German occupation.

For me, this image was very different. I wasn’t immediately sure why it struck me. But upon reflection, I realized that this photograph was the perfect representation and summation of America’s most profound and far-reaching impact during WWII...her Sons and Daughters. These men and women (many barely adults) spread American ideals, hard work, ingenuity, and democracy around the globe, as well as offered a glimpse of what a nation comprised of many nationalities could achieve when working together, and of a more practical nature, offered a peek at a standard of living that was heretofore unknown for most people. In one shutter click, this photo portrays what countless history books, Hollywood movies, documentaries, and news stories have tried to describe over the years, about those men and women from 80 years ago...Why the “Greatest Generation” was so aptly named.

To point, some unknown GI, who had probably never been out of his local county, had left behind his mother and father, donned uniform, trained, sailed across the open seas at great peril from enemy navies, and in the case of the European theater of operations, invaded an entire continent that had been heavily fortified against Allied invasion. And here was this lone GI, taking time to show kindness, concern, and warmheartedness.

So when I came across this photograph in December 2020 in an online paper ephemera auction, the collector in me had to have it, and I made the purchase. Upon receipt, I quickly realized that this photograph was in fact a so-called “press-photo.” (Press photographs were taken by professional photographers, in the employ of international news gathering services, such as Associated Press. Such services would send photographers far and wide, and for a fee would make the photos taken available to smaller, regional, Stateside newspapers, for usage in their local publications.) On the back of this photo, it was noted that this particular image was utilized in the July 12, 1944, edition of *The Cleveland News* (a daily newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio, which ran from 1905 until 1960). Even more insightful was copy of the caption that ran underneath the photograph: **French Triplets Find a Friend** — Corporal Harold Myers of Lancaster, PA, points out to Chantal, Jacqueline, and Georgette Casine, 4-year-old French triplets, a distant artillery barrage being laid down by the Americans during the advance on Cherbourg.

Amazing! Having this info is profound for a photo collector, and rarely is one provided with a contemporary annotation. Not only a date and a location, but names, and best of all, some circumstance. This brought the entire image into context! With this info I could surmise that, as the caption alluded to, this photo was taken some time after the massive Allied invasion that occurred across a large swath of the Normandy region in France on June 6, 1944, and before the capture of the coastal city of Cherbourg on June 28, 1944.



**A BRIEF HISTORY:** The coastal city of Cherbourg, situated on the English Channel and located at the northern tip of the Cotentin Peninsula in the Normandy region of France, was considered to be vital to the long-term success of the Allied invasion of Europe in June 1944. Mostly American troops were tasked with turning northwards from the “Utah Beach” landing zone and capturing the city, so critical because of its deep-water port facilities and ship offloading infrastructure. Some 25,000 fighting troops under German General Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben were entrenched in and around Cherbourg. But American forces, under overall command of Major General “Lighting Joe” Joseph Collins, continued to push west and north, and with the aid of US aerial strikes and Allied naval bombardment, finally killed or captured all remaining German forces in Cherbourg and the peninsula around July 1, 1944. (As a side note, by the time Cherbourg fell, the port facilities had been totally demolished and mined by the Germans, who at all costs wanted to deny the Allies a usable resource. American Seabees and Navy salvage ships and crews worked around the clock to restore the harbor to operational capacity. Finally, by July 16th, the first Allied freight was able to be discharged, and by September, 17,000 tons of material were being offloaded daily. Cherbourg continued to be a main point of entry for supplies for the US Army, for the duration of the war.)

So with this short research into the fighting in the Cotentin Peninsula during June 1944 in hand, I could more precisely deduce that the image was probably taken around June 18th-20th. Could the exact location be determined? Surely not; there were no other clues that I could turn to. Normally at this point in my research related to photographs that I add to my collection, I would be quite pleased with all that I had learned, and with the existing original newspaper caption, I in fact knew far more about this photo than most that I collect. Generally by this point, I’m happy to tuck the photo away into an archival protective sleeve, and enjoy the image occasionally, or share it with fellow collector friends.

But a fantastical (more like ridiculous) notion tugged at my mind for some reason...Were any of the subjects of this photograph still alive? The serviceman...probably not likely. He would potentially be close to 95 to 100 years old. But the triplets...based on

their stated age, they would be around the age of my Mother, and she is certainly in good health, and of active mind. Could the Casine sisters be found alive, in France, today? Had they ever seen this image before? Did they know that they had appeared in at least one major newspaper in the faraway States (and in fact, probably in several Stateside papers)? What an intriguing notion! I didn't have much to go on, but I did have their names, at least prior to marriage. And as is common in Europe, people very much tend to remain close to where they were born. But where were the sisters from exactly? The Cotentin peninsula is a fairly large area.

**THE RESEARCH:** Now walking around with this crazy question in my mind, I couldn't think about much else. The natural first place to turn towards for further information was, as I like to say, the "power of the Internet." More specifically, I'm a longtime member of a WWII collectors forum, where one can go to "show and tell" items from one's collection, look at other members' collections, educate oneself about various collecting topics, or ask questions related to all manner of WWII artifacts, ephemera, and events. It's a vast repository of knowledge, hosting collectors and amateur historians from all over the world. This forum was the perfect place to consult.

So I began by posting a digital scan of the photograph, along with the basic question of seeking assistance (hopefully from a French collector) as to help in determining if the sisters were still alive, and might there be the possibility of locating them, with the intent of sharing this image with them. This was in January 2021, during the winter months (when I seem to undertake a lot of research projects). Within less than one hour, a forum member from England posted what he believed to be the obituary of a "Georgette Marie Louise Casine," who had been born in the tiny French village in Saint-Jacques-de Nehou in May of 1940, and who sadly had passed away on August 13, 2020. Without further information, it was certainly possible that the deceased Georgette may have been one of the Casine triplets, but by no means positively confirmed.

Another member, who actually lives in Normandy, quickly chimed in offering to assist further, by perhaps locating any surviving family members, and sharing the image with them. Within a short time, this individual was able to reach out by phone to one of the daughters of one of the Casine sisters (after finding a phone number via a regional search) and was able to confirm that Chantal and Jacqueline were still living, and that unfortunately, Georgette had in fact passed away. And he was able to confirm that the family was aware of the photograph, and had a copy (from where, he was not certain). He also passed on gratitude as expressed by this family member, that I had made the effort to reach out, and to share the image.

While this information was rewarding to learn, and I was surely grateful for the anonymous forum member's assistance, it still left me wanting to pursue more. Never once taking the easy path in life, I somehow felt that only an in-person meeting would fully assuage this quest. It was settled...a trip to France would be required!

Being 2020, the world pandemic was still limiting international travel, so plans would need to defer. In 2021, I completed a big trip to Belgium and Germany, for other research projects that I had been pursuing, as well as attending a large European militaria collector's show. In 2022, again it was back to Belgium and Germany to bring closure to the 2021 projects, as well as attending another militaria show. Finally, 2023 provided the time and opportunity. But how was I actually going to locate and connect with the sisters, especially not speaking French, or knowing exactly where or how to find them? Would I be too late?

Interestingly, on the 2021 trip while visiting with a good friend by the name of Giel who lives near Gent, Belgium, he showed me box after box full of old photographs. He had just recently purchased an extensive collection, that had belonged to a renowned researcher of various WWII collector topics. While sorting through a few handfuls of the hundreds of photos, looking for something to purchase and add to my collection, I came across another example of this same press photo of Corporal Myers and the Casine sisters. This one was of a slightly smaller size, but the same exact image. Of most interest to me, was a period caption of the reverse of the photo, which differed from my example. Starting with the tag line, ***The Corporal Makes Friends in Normandy***, it read: *Corporal Harold Myers, Lancaster, Penn., makes friends with three small French girls as he lets them look through his field glasses at the artillery barrage laid down by the Americans during the advance on Cherbourg. Their names are Chantal, Jacqueline, and Georgette Casine and they are four-year-old triplets. Associated Press Photo 269044.*

While the exact same image, with similar text, this completely happenstance discovery of the second image just reinforced the passion and "fueled the fire" to see if I could actually locate the two living triplets, meet them in person, and hopefully learn more about the circumstances of the photo, and their recollections of that time in history. It was time to get serious about

planning a trip. So when late summer 2023 provided a window of time, I realized that I needed to take the plunge now, or perhaps miss forever the opportunity; it had already been too long in waiting.

But what did I have to go on? Not much. First names, and a family name that had probably changed if they had gotten married, and maybe the name of their birth village, Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou. In fact that was the village. (A Wikipedia search turned up information that this tiny village had a current population of just over 600 people and was situated towards the west of the Cotentin Peninsula, about 30 minutes due south of Cherbourg, and 25 minutes due west of Saint-Mere-Eglise, the historic drop zone of US 101st Airborne paratroopers on 6 June 1944.) Were they still in the area? Had they moved? All good questions.

At this point, it was early August of 2023, and I had a ten-day window in mid-September, when I could make a trip. I quickly bought an airline ticket and started making plans. By this time, I had about six weeks to hopefully locate and set a meeting.

**THE SEARCH:** I had sort of lost contact with the online Forum member from France who had helped me previously in early 2021, although at one point in 2022 he had provided me with two names of ladies with the last name of "Casine," and a couple of phone numbers from a French directory — he just wasn't able to recall with whom he had spoken for sure, or what number he had called. With this info in hand, I signed up for international calling on my cell phone. Even though I didn't speak French, these names and numbers were the best leads that I had. After repeated calls, over the course of two weeks, I was never able to reach anyone. The numbers rang, but there was never an answer.

Time was quickly escaping from me, and only a little over three weeks remained before I was to depart. I soon realized that without a local contact or researcher, it would be nearly impossible for me to find the surviving triplets on my own. I knew several collector friends in Europe, but mostly in Belgium and Germany. But I did have a longtime collector friend from southern France, who in fact was also a writer and researcher relating to various WWII topics. It took a few days to connect with him, but unfortunately Philippe was unable to assist, as he himself was departing soon for a trip to the States. Another researcher from Belgium that I was familiar with did offer up the name of another WWII amateur historian in the Normandy region, that I might reach out to. So I messaged this individual by the name of Florent, via Facebook, and was finally able to connect with him, and explain my interest and my intent to meet the Casine sisters. His response was, "I'll find them, no problem!" What a relief for me, or so I thought. As it turned out, after further follow up, this individual was unsuccessful, conceding that he was at a dead end. By this point in time, I was down to the last week before I departed. I was truly back to "square one." I felt that I might need to literally start knocking on doors, in the tiny village of Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou.

As a final last-ditch effort (and in fact, this being only three days before my flight), I had the idea to reach out to a couple of the WWII museums that I also planned to visit during my ten days in Normandy and see if someone on their staff might be able to assist me in my search. I first contacted the *Musee de la bataille des haies* (Museum of the Battle of the Hedgerows), also known as the Normandy Victory Museum, located in Carentan-les-Marais, and spoke with Godefroy, the Director. He agreed to assist and asked me to forward him by email the photo in question. To this, he replied that he had forwarded my request, along with the photograph, to an amateur historian in the area of Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou.

Not wanting to put all my faith in this request alone, and with three days rapidly falling away before my departure date, I also reached out to another very renowned museum in the area, the Airborne Museum in Sainte-Mere-Eglise. I was able to speak with the museum's Director, a woman by the name of Magali. She in turn asked for the image to be emailed to her, which I did. At that time, I heard nothing back.

For now, I had done all that I could, and in the remaining three days, I still had to finish laying out my route, sorting various stops, and booking hotels. I would continue to monitor my email, but I had exhausted all efforts at locating and arranging a meeting with the Casine sisters. Looks like I was going to be knocking on strangers' doors in a foreign country, without speaking the native tongue...which would not be the first time. But determination ran deep.

**THE TRIP:** The first stop was in Paris, but only for a short time. A late afternoon visit to the famous *Basilica of Sacré Coeur de Montmartre*, dinner on a sidewalk cafe, and a nighttime visit to the *Arc de Triomphe* and the iconic Eiffel Tower. Then early next morning, it was off to the Normandy region, to start my itinerary in the eastern most area of the Allied invasion area.



This was the area where British and Canadian forces landed on June 6, 1944, and started moving inland. The first museum stop for me was to be the *Le Memorial de Caen* museum, located in the city of Caen (Caen having been a key operational objective for British forces to take on June 6th, as the city was a central crossroads and communications hub of German forces. In reality, the Germans were never fully ousted until late July.). The museum focused not only on the D-Day landing itself, but also on the larger battle for Normandy, which ensued over the next two months in that region. After parking my rental car and walking the short distance to the museum entrance, I almost fell over from shock and amazement...there in front of me, was a large "Welcome" sign, in French and English, with "my" photograph! Corporal Myers was pointing the way to the museum entrance, with two of the three Casine sisters pictured. I couldn't have been more surprised, and admittedly, more disheartened, knowing that the main reason for booking this entire trip, was as yet unconfirmed, and quite likely not to occur.



Nonetheless, I would continue on my itinerary of stops, excited and profoundly pleased to be able to visit all the museums, memorials, landing beaches, bunkers, fortifications, and battle sites that dot the vast Normandy region. Stops included places like the Merville Battery, Le Grand Bunker Museum, the city of Bayeux, the D-Day Museum and the remaining artificial harbor sections in Arromanches-les-Bains, the impressive Battery de Longues-sur-Mer, the profoundly moving American Cemetery and D-Day Museum in Colleville-sur-Mer, Omaha Beach where American soldiers died in great numbers, Pointe du Hoc, the mind-blowing D-Day Experience Museum, "Dead Man's Corner," and Utah Beach.

As I continued to move westwards along the coast, towards the final destination of Saint-Mere-Eglise in the Cotentin Peninsula, my route would take me to both of the previously mentioned museums that I had reached out to — the Normandy Victory Museum and the Airborne Museum. While visiting these museums, I would certainly attempt to personally connect with the directors that I had spoken with on the phone, shortly before departing the States, to see if there had been any updates.

While visiting the Normandy Victory Museum on Wednesday, September 20th, I had occasion to not only meet Godefroy, the Director, but also the museum Founder, Patrick. Godefroy unfortunately hadn't heard back from the local historian that he had previously reached out to by email, and was at a loss. Patrick, as it turns out (and not surprisingly), was a longtime collector of WWII militaria. In fact, he started interviewing French citizens in the region back when he was a teenager, about their personal recollections and experiences during the German occupation, and the Allied invasion. It was during these interviews that many times, he would be offered up old helmets or equipment, or other artifacts of the war, that had been picked up literally off the battlefield by their current owners. Both American and German artifacts, and as the decades continued, Patrick's collection grew and became a passion, and ultimately morphed into becoming the very foundation of the wonderful Normandy Victory Museum. (The extent and the quality of all these artifacts are hard to convey, and all are cast in faithfully recreated life-size dioramas! What an amazing museum, that I hope to visit again soon.) Upon learning about my longtime interest in WWII militaria and history, as well as realizing that we had mutual collector friends and attended some of the same collector shows, and learning of my current quest, Patrick was gracious enough to offer to meet me on Friday, the 22nd, on his day off from his regular full-time job, and assist me with attempting to locate the Casine sisters. At this point, I finally felt a glimmer of hope that a meeting might be arranged, assuming that we could find them. It was left that I would telephone Patrick Thursday evening to arrange a "game plan" for Friday's travel.

On Thursday the 21st, by the time that I reached my hotel for the evening, I now had two full days remaining in France, before I had to make my way back to Paris and fly out on Sunday morning, the 24th. While settling into my room and checking my emails, I was amazed to find an email that came from the Airborne Museum. But not from Magali, whom I had originally spoken with before I left the States, but from the Director of Communications, an individual by the name of Hugo.

Hugo, it seems, had been tasked with researching and assisting with my request. Hugo had great news. He had contacted the village administrative office of Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou and had found out that, "Yes, Chantal and Jacqueline were still alive," and confirmed that sadly Georgette had indeed passed away in 2020 (as had been previously confirmed). Chantal now resided in a local retirement home, and Jacqueline had moved out of the area. But best of all, the administrative office was able to provide the name and phone number of Chantal's son and daughter, both still residing locally. What great information, finally! While still remaining to connect with either the son or daughter and explain my interest and intent (and assuming they were

agreeable), I felt that with Patrick's help and ability to communicate in both French and English, I still might be able to arrange an in-person meeting with one or perhaps even both of the Casine sisters.

I then reached out to Patrick with the info that I had learned and was hit with yet another setback — due to a sick colleague, Patrick had been called into work on Friday, the day that we had planned to rendezvous. And he was already previously engaged on Saturday. I was dejected. And not speaking French was again proving to hamper my efforts, or I would have reached out myself to the son or daughter. But there was still one small glimmer.

On Friday the 22nd, my plans all along had been to visit the stellar Airborne Museum in Saint-Mere-Eglise, the museum from which Hugo had communicated to me. Would he be available? He was clearly fluent in English and was already aware of my quest to meet and interview the sisters and present them a copy of the press photo (that I had carefully made a copy of at home and carried along with me all this trip). I could hardly sleep that night. It was nearly the end of my trip.

Friday morning, after rain on Thursday, arrived bright and fresh, with lots of sun low in the sky, wonderfully illuminating the medieval stone church in the central square of Saint-Mere-Eglise. While I was waiting for the Airborne Museum to open at 9:30 AM, I pondered the famous church, with a recreated parachute and US Army 101st Division "Screaming Eagle" paratrooper dangling from the steeple, exactly as had occurred in the early morning, still dark hours of June 6th, 1944. In appearance, very little had changed in this village. It felt like 1944 was only a few days ago. The village had played a significant part in the Allied landings and was one of several main objectives that our paratroopers had been tasked with taking, early and fast. Now, it's sort of a Mecca for WWII history buffs the world over, and hosts an astounding museum, focused on the paratroopers and glider-borne troops who cascaded into this area almost 80 years ago.

Finally entering the museum's central admission office, I inquired if Hugo might be working. And in fact, he was. I made an introduction and thanked him for the information that he had provided two days earlier. So far, he had been the most successful, and of the most assistance. But I had one more favor to ask...would he be willing to place a phone call to one of the children, introduce me (by phone), inform them of my interest in the photograph and my trip all the way from the States, and see if one or both of the Casine sisters might be willing to meet for an interview? And indeed, he was kind enough and willing to do so.

So while in the lobby area of the museum, Hugo reached out to Helene, the daughter of Chantal. Much conversation in French took place, with an occasional question for me, or an interjection by me. After several minutes, it was confirmed that Chantal resided in a local retirement home, not far from Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou, and that according to Helene, another daughter, Sylvie, was actually going to visit their mother on Saturday afternoon, and could I be there around 3:00 PM? Of course I could! (And it was the very last full day of my time in France!) It was also conveyed to me that Jacqueline, as I had learned two days prior, was unfortunately not in the area, and that a meeting with her at this short notice would not be possible. I still felt that success had been achieved! I asked Hugo to verify the name and address of the location that he had secured from Helene. And with that, the meeting was finally set after nearly three years! I was in disbelief, but so relieved. It had been an incredible trip thus far, filled with history and beautiful sites and scenery, but this interview was the entire motive and intention of my trip to Europe.

**THE MEETING:** Departing the hotel in Saint-Mere-Eglise early on Saturday morning, I had some time to fill before the afternoon appointment. I decided to visit the tiny village of Saint-Come-du-Mont (another key objective of the US paratroopers on D-Day, and that factored prominently in the history of paratrooper lore), the Collins Museum (a fantastic olden French chateau & barn, that served as the headquarters of General Collins, mentioned earlier in this story), and finally the deadly Crisbeq Battery, another key D-Day objective, for it served as a devastating German coastal artillery emplacement (part of the vaunted "Atlantic Wall," raining shells down on the transport and landing craft facing Utah Beach). They were all within a relatively short distance of each other, leaving time to drive the 25 minutes or so to the retirement home meeting location.

Upon arriving, I entered the retirement home, and inquired of the nursing home staff if there was a Chantal living here? Someone on staff managed to understand just enough English to know why I was there and convey a few words of welcome. Apparently, word had preceded my arrival, that Chantal was having a guest (crazy American?) who had flown all the way over from America, just to meet and interview her. This was exceedingly big news in this small, well-kept, little retirement home. Within seconds, there must have been six female staff who led me into Chantal's room, and all followed me inside to a very clean, tidy, and quaint room. Present already were Chantal of course, and who I presumed to be her daughter and son-in-law. And now me and six



interested nurses! I'm not sure that so many people had ever been in that one small room at once! As soon as the initial excitement settled down, the staff quickly departed, and the next immediate task was to get Hugo on the phone, on speaker, as no one spoke English, nor I French. (I had already "warned" Hugo that he might be getting a call, to facilitate communications.) Through Hugo, I was able to introduce myself, and formally make the acquaintance of Chantal Casine, her daughter Sylvie, and Sylvie's husband, Yves (at left). But the first impression that overrode my mind was the approximately 8" x 10" black and white photo that hung framed on the wall...the very same image that had caught my attention in late 2019. I was obviously at the right place.

I had prepared several questions that I wanted to ask, relating to the circumstances of the photo, Chantal's recollections thereof, and about her life after the war. But firstly, I wanted Hugo to convey the reason as to how and why this photograph had come my way, why I became intrigued, and what led me to pursue this journey. The reasons are the ones that I have already conveyed early on in this story, but in short, the photo had become one my favorite wartime vintage photographs, and I was intrigued to learn more about the circumstances, and the people portrayed. I think that Chantal, Sylvie, and Yves, were all deeply impressed that I had made the effort and undertaken the trip. This "broke the ice" as the saying goes.

For ease and brevity, I've outlined the conversation as it occurred, with a question-and-answer format (with my observations or additions in parenthesis). I was aware from the beginning that Chantal was very young at the time and precise recollections would be limited, but I was nonetheless interested to hear her recounting.

**Q: Do you recall where exactly the photo was taken?**

**Chantal:** *In Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou, at my great grandmother's house.* (The location of which is still known precisely to this day, as I understand.)

**Q: When did you first find out about the photo, or become aware that you and your sisters had appeared in the photo?**

**Chantal:** *I first learned of the photograph in 1997! Some man had found the photograph at a flea market near Germany. He sent the photo to the townhall (mayor's office) in Cherbourg, along with a note asking that the photo be forwarded to me and my sisters. The townhall was able to do some research, find the Casine family, and forward the photo to me.* (This is the exact photo that now hangs on Chantal's wall today. Chantal expressed great emotion at this discovery and was amazed and surprised that she and her sisters were pictured. Rough transcription of the letter that Chantal received with the photo in 1997: *Madam, Please find attached a photo taken near Cherbourg in 1944 and representing you as a child with your sisters. This photo was sent to me by Mr. Rémy Guth, from the city Oberhoffen-sur-Moder (France), who found it on a "Marché aux Puces" (flea market) in Alsace. Mr. Guth, wishing that the people pictured in this photo be the beneficiaries of this photo, I have carried out research that led me to your family. Remaining at your disposal for more information. Please accept, Madam, the expression of my distinguished consideration. Signed by a townhall official*)

**Q: How old were you at the time of the photo?**

**Chantal:** *I was born in January 1939, so I was 5-1/2 years old at the time of the photo. And we were not triplets, as the photo says! Jacqueline and Georgette were twins, aged 4 at the time.*

**Q: Where were you living at the time of the photo?**

**Chantal:** *In Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou, about 500 meters from my great-grandmother's house.*

**Q: How did you feel about the American GIs as you were growing up, and what they had done for the French people?**

**Chantal:** *Being only a very young girl at the time of liberation, I was profoundly struck by all the food that the Americans brought, especially after years of rationing and "black bread." They brought chocolate and white bread, which were surprising delights.* (Black bread was apparently some sort of wartime low-end staple, and must have been less than tasty, based on the look on Chantal's face. It was interesting to note the amazement that Chantal seemed to find with the endless amount of foodstuffs and rations, and this abundance seemed to have really stuck with her all these years.)

**Q: Would you mind sharing a little about your life after the war?**

**Chantal:** *I got married, worked and lived on a farm where we raised cows, and had three children.*

**Q: Has there ever been any kind of public ceremony or public acknowledgement of this photo in the area or at any WWII museums? Have you been asked to make an appearance relating to this photo?**

**Chantal:** *No, no ceremony regarding the photo, never.* (But she did state that she was aware of her photo being outside the museum in Caen. It seemed to me at the time, that this was sort of disappointing that no one in her surrounding community had acknowledged her or her sisters, and this wonderful wartime photograph. This is my observation alone, and nothing that Chantal conveyed.)

**Q: Which one are you in the photo?**

**Chantal:** *I am the middle one. Jacqueline is on the left, Georgette on the right.*

(I was surprised to learn this, as this is not what the press photo caption stated, and I was even more surprised to learn that they were not in fact triplets.)



By this point in the afternoon, I think that it had been quite a bit of unaccustomed excitement and emotion for Chantal, who appeared to be tiring. I wanted to save some time to have her sign a copy of the photograph that I had carried along with me from back home, and to take some photographs. I teased her that she was going to make me look bad in the photos, as she was dressed so nicely, and was much better looking than me. This got a smile indeed from Chantal.

After the impromptu “photo session,” I conveyed my thanks to Chantal, Sylvie, and Yves for allowing me to meet with them, and learn about the circumstances of the photo, and a little about the three sisters in the photo. I conveyed as best I could what a heartfelt and unbelievable journey this had been for me, and it was definitely worth the time and energy. I believe they all were thankful for the interest, albeit amazed that I would make such a long trip, over just a photo. The flattery that they expressed was more than worth it.

**AFTERTHOUGHTS:** Upon saying “Aurevoir” and departing, had there been more time, I would have attempted to locate the exact spot of the photo, but that is an adventure for another trip. I did make a drive through the village of Saint-Jacques-de-Nehou, and surely it had not changed much in the past nearly 80 years since the photo was taken not far from the central square. By this time, it was close to 6:30 PM and the hotel desk where I was staying at in Paris closed at 10:00 PM, which left me little time to delay on the 3-1/2 hour drive back to the City of Lights.

Upon returning to the States, I decided to write this story, not to tell a tale about myself or my adventure, but to memorialize this photograph, and the information that I had learned in connection to it. Even more importantly, I wanted to preserve and honor the service of Corporal Myers (and of all the GIs involved in the liberation of Europe), as well as remember the lives of the Casine sisters. It was a simple photograph, not profound or important or well-known, but it nonetheless captured a “slice-in-time.” For me, having the pleasure of finding and meeting one of the people portrayed in the photos that I collect and study, turned out to be an experience and a moment that I will never forget.

**POSTSCRIPT:** I have only used the first names of the various people that I contacted or met with (other than the Casine sisters), out of respect for their privacy. Additionally, I would like to note that any mistakes of fact, or of memory, or of details recorded during the meeting with Chantal, are solely my mistakes of memory or research, for which I bear responsibility.

I would also like to deeply thank the many people who assisted, or even attempted to assist, with my research, my search, my trip, and my final meeting. All of the people mentioned above in this story played a critical role, with one contact leading to another contact, one step leading to another step. Everything built on each setback, or on each success. Not only on this research project, but on any that I have undertaken. It has solely been through the unselfish and generous help of usually total strangers that I have been able to meet, visit, and learn about so many different facets of WWII history.

A special “Thanks” to Sylvia and Yves, for welcoming this “crazy American” into their Mother’s residence and taking time from their day. A special “Thank You” to the staff of the retirement home, for not only taking good care of Chantal, but of all the other residents. And for greeting me with such wonderment and exuberance. And an apology to many of the people who helped me, for putting up with my inability at being able to speak French. Traveling in France, as elsewhere in Europe, would not be as possible for me, but for the gracious nature of so many who speak English, and are willing to be patient.



Finally, I feel that I owe a very special “Thank You” to Hugo (pictured with me at left) of the Airborne Museum. I give great credit and appreciation to Hugo, without whom none of this story would have been possible. Not only for fielding the initial research and arranging the meeting but serving as an extraordinary translator and communicator during my interview with Chantal. And the Saturday meeting was on his day off from work!

And I must take the opportunity to thank my Mother and Father, for somehow imparting my interest in history and world travel.