



Family remembers the pain of a veteran taken too soon

By Lila M. Lister

It's been more than 50 years now but Charles Bettencourt remembers well. World War II was raging and the little flag in the window of the Bettencourt home on Stackhouse Street in New Bedford's South End bore six blue stars.

Twelve kids were in the Bettencourt family, 11 sons and a daughter, when the war broke out, and six sons went into combat, the last one Arthur, who was 18 when he joined the Army.

Charles, now in retirement after 35 years with the Acushnet Co., remembers how Arthur loved the family and was always there when he was needed growing up.

Life had been hard. The head of the family, Joseph Bettencourt, worked for the city water department. Charles was 5 with two younger siblings when his father died. His mother, Elvira, kept the family together through the hard times that followed his death.

Arthur, a private, was trained in communications and he soon found himself putting his skills to use in the European campaign, beginning with D-Day and the liberation of France.

"I was the last one to see him and he always had high hopes of coming back," Charles, 73, recalled. "But then he got transferred to another battalion and he had given up hope of ever coming home. His new outfit was really in the middle of everything."

The new outfit was the 357th Battalion of the 90th Artillery Division. The transfer came in December 1944, just in time to put Arthur in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge.

His job was to climb poles and repair communication lines.

He was killed by a German sniper while fixing a line on Jan. 12, 1945, in Berle, Luxembourg.

"I remember the sadness," said Charles. "I was working at Otis Field with a civilian crew and they rushed me home that night in a Jeep and when I got home it was a sad place. All the brothers were there and my mother. It was very sad, of course. And the same year, a few months later, my younger brother was killed by a trolley car. Two in the family within a few months. My mother, oh my, she went through a lot. She was a strong lady."

Arthur Bettencourt's remains were sent home for burial in St. John's Cemetery.

His family received his medals, which included the Bronze Service Award, the Purple Heart, and battle stars for Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland and the Ardennes.

Today, Charles is left with his memories of his handsome young brother, dead at age 22. Lost over the years are the medals, the letters from Europe, the American flag that covered his coffin.





90th Division Association Personal Submissions

Only the photographs remain.

For years, Charles wished a flag could fly in memory of his brother. Last May, he got his wish when, in a special Memorial Day ceremony in the North End, a flag was raised in honor of two young men killed while serving their country: Alfonso Lucio Jr. and Arthur Bettencourt.

Arthur Bettencourt, 22, was killed by a German sniper on Jan. 12, 1945, in Luxembourg, leaving behind a large, grieving family in New Bedford.