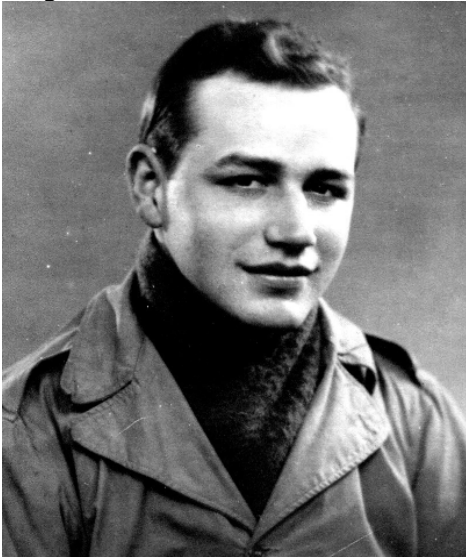


Richard Maslankoski

*Co. E, 424th Regiment
S/Sgt 424E/Weapons Platoon
T/Sgt 422C
1Sgt USAF (Korea)
106th Infantry Division*

Dick Maslankoski was my uncle and godfather. He was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1924, growing up in a neighborhood known as the "Back of the Yards", the area surrounding the stockyards. He was the seventh of eight children and, along with his brother Bob, entered the Army on March 9th, 1943 at the age of 19.



I was also born in Chicago and lived in the same neighborhood as Dick. My uncle and I spent a lot of time together and I admired him very much. Throughout my youth he taught me the quiet pleasures of lake fishing, the camaraderie of team bowling and the importance of fair play. He did not talk about his experiences during World War II except in the most general of terms. I had seen photographs of him in uniform and my dad had shown me a German Lugar pistol that my uncle had given him. It was only after my mother died in 2000 that I began to find some clues to his actual wartime history. Hidden amongst her family photo albums and memorabilia was a small folder containing some aged and delicate papers that led to the unfolding of my Uncle Dick's military career.

One of the documents was a copy of the Smash and Drive Weekly, a 106th Division newspaper published by the 422nd Regiment after the war ended. A very well drawn sketch of Dick was used for the front page, complete with a misspelling (Maslankowski) of his last name – a problem I found to be quite common as my research continued.

The article was a story of a young S/Sgt of the 424/E who had single-handedly knocked out a German machine gun nest.



"It was on the morning of January 26, 1945, and Dick's company was advancing on Medell, Belgium. One of the most vivid memories in Dick's mind of the time was his current fear that the section's guns would freeze and jam. Actually, that is precisely what happened later on. When the company was pinned down by Schmeisser fire from a camouflaged enemy position Dick, who admits having no thoughts as to his personal safety, grabbed one of his light 30s and singly advanced across an open strip of ground, spattering a hail of lead throughout the enemy front. Then his gun did jam, the only thing he could do was take immediate action right there in the snow. When the stoppage was repaired (at some point during his advance, he had been spotted and a great deal of enemy fire was directed at him), Dick continued his advance, knocking out the position, and inspiring the rest of our troops to advance and eventually take the town."

The second document was an oilskin copy of the orders awarding the Silver Star to my uncle.

Award of Silver Star

R E S T R I C T E D

**HEADQUARTERS 106TH INFANTRY DIVISION
A.F.O. #443. U.S. ARMY**

GENERAL ORDERS)

29 March 1945

NO. 34)

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II -- AWARD OF SILVER STAR -- Under the provisions of AR 600-45, 22 September 1943, as amended, and pursuant to authority contained in Memorandum Number 21, Fifteenth United States Army, 4 March 1945, the Silver Star is awarded to the following officer and enlisted men:

• • • • •

Staff Sergeant Richard J. Maslankoski, 36 648 895, 424th Infantry, United States Army, for gallantry in action on 26 January 1945, in Belgium. When the attack of a rifle platoon, supported by his heavy weapons section was halted by withering small arms and automatic fire from a nearby woods, Staff Sergeant Maslankoski, cradling a light machine gun in his arms, arose, firing his weapon. Delivering a devastating hail of bullets at a camouflaged machine gun nest he detected, Staff Sergeant Maslankoski valiantly moved forward until his gun jammed. Despite incessant hostile fire, Staff Sergeant Maslankoski cleared the weapon, resumed his advance, killed the two man crew and destroyed the enemy position. Entered military service from Illinois.

• • • • •


By command of Major General STROH:

**WILLIAM C. BAYER, JR.
Colonel, G.S.C.
Chief of Staff**

OFFICIAL:

/s/ F. I. Agule
/t/ F. I. AGULE
Lt. Colonel, A.G.D.
Adjutant General

THIS IS A TRUE EXTRACT COPY:


**M. N. CRANK
Captain, 422d Infantry
Adjutant**

Under the provisions of AR 600-45, 22 September 1943, as amended, and pursuant to authority contained in Memorandum Number 21, Fifteenth United States Army, 4 March 1945, the Silver Star is awarded to the following office and enlisted men:

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The citation is dated March 29, 1945 and signed by Captain Crank, 422nd Adjutant to Major General Stroth, who took command of the 106th Division on Feb. 28, 1945. This is significant because there are several documents and also an eye witness account that credit Dick's heroic action as having happened in the retaking of Manhay, Belgium on Dec. 25, 1944. John Kline gave me a contact list of soldiers who had served in the 424/E and I was able to contact several of them by mail. Some knew my uncle from the training days at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, a few didn't remember him at all, but one man not only knew him – he had fought next to him and credited Dick with saving his life. Bob Mattiko was a PFC in the mortar section of the 424/E weapons platoon. He credits Dick with saving his life at Manhay. He also states that Dick refused a battlefield commission and after the Battle of the Bulge was over Dick was transferred to the 422nd Regiment as a T/Sgt. I have an audio tape of a telephone interview with Bob that is amazing in its realism and depth.

After his return to civilian life in 1946, Dick enlisted in the Air Force in 1952 and served during the Korean War as a First Sergeant. The records for this part of his history are as yet undiscovered. My uncle passed away from prostate cancer in 1990.

This quest has led me on a search that started with the Internet, introduced me to John Kline and the members of the 106th Infantry Division Association, immersed me in a very large library of books dedicated to the true story of the Battle of the Bulge and opened up a new world of knowledge residing at www.indianamilitary.org, courtesy of Jim West. I hope every member of the 106th Infantry Division Association will submit a history of their own or of their relatives who served this country so proudly and so well.





NBC Bowling Team - 1971

By: Larry Heider

DICK MASLANKOSKI

We went down to Charley company the other day, in the hopes of seeing Dick Maslankoski, the T/Sgt who was recently awarded the Silver Star. But it was Sunday morning, and a poor time for an interview, because Dick, a good Catholic, was off to Mass. However, we managed to pass the time until he returned quite profitably, by asking some of his less religious buddies about him.

It seems that Dick is only 20 (We haven't found out the average age of T/Sgts, but that is quite young indeed.). He's been with the 106th ever since its activation, and was a machine gun section leader with Easy Co. of the 424th during the Bulge. It was impossible to find anything but praise for Dick and a fervent respect for him was very evident. One old timer in the Company had a particularly indicative note of praise, saying that he considered Dick, "One of the best damned machine gun men" he had ever seen.

Presently, Dick returned from Church and we found him a very personable young man, although a trifle apprehensive at the prospect of an interview. Like most soldiers who have won some sort of high award for gallantry, Dick feels that his deeds were nothing compared with those of some of his buddies. "We were all doing a job together, and I was simply carrying out my part of the work." That we hastened to point out, is an understatement, in the light of his citation, which clearly indicates action on Dick's part above and beyond the call of duty. However, with characteristic modesty, Dick remarked that practically everything that was done on the front, in those bleak days of late January, was above and beyond the call.

It was on the morning of January 26, 1945, and Dick's company was advancing on Madoll, Belgium. One of the most vivid memories in Dick's mind of the time was his current fear that the section's guns would freeze and jam. Actually, that is precisely what happened later on. When the company was pinned-down by Schmeisser fire from a camouflaged enemy position Dick, who admits having no thoughts as to his personal safety, grabbed one of his light 30s and singly ad-

(Cont. on Page 8.)

Maslankoski Cont...

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As we took leave of Dick, we distinctly had the feeling of having been taken in by his modest manner, but reading the citation again, came to the conclusion that we had just met a very outstanding soldier.



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