

## Jimmie Lee Richards

422nd/B

KIA

Having written feature articles for 'the Paper'/Senior Life for more than 12 and a half years now, I knew (through feedback from editor, Jeri Seely) that I had impacted the lives of a number of people by way of "excursions" back into history\_ Little did I know that the day would come when one of my own articles would lead me down that nostalgic path into history in such an emotional and mysterious way.

"Mishawaka High School and WWII" was the starting, focal point of the article for which I drew information from dad's 1940s school annuals--The Miskodeed. Emphasized in the story was how WWII affected the lives of Mishawaka students, faculty, administrators and staff. Since the story dealt with a time of more than fifty years past, I assumed that it would simply be read, enjoyed and there it would end.

Dad died in 1979, but before his passing, my sisters and I learned a little bit about dad's old neighborhood in northside Mishawaka. Then, in early February, 2003, after the article came out, a man whom I'd never heard of before, called and left a message with mother. He had read the article and had a surprise for us. Frank Hoskins, an old neighborhood and childhood friend of dad's, had a photo of himself, dad and the old "gang" of northside Mishawaka; a photo that we never knew existed.

It was not just a run-of-the-mill photo, but a special photo of a group of preteenage boys at a birthday party: Frank Hoskins' 10th birthday party on August 20, 1937. It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but they were wrong as this picture was worth a million. Hoskins recalled, as best he could, the childhood years and the neighborhood of the East Lawrence, Grove and Battell Streets of Mishawaka, and then talked about the various paths the "gang" had taken after the war.

One of the favorite winter events for these youngsters, of which dad had told us many times, was sledding down the streets that sloped southward from Broadway Street. Hoskins recalled these events, but one story he hadn't heard about was the time dad and some of the "gang" decided to use bean shooters as they slid swiftly downhill one day. Dad's sled stopped when he suddenly hit something. The bean shooter did not, and was jammed into the back of his throat, thus putting an end to any desire of future bean-shooting events!

While Hoskins reviewed the lives of the young boys in his photo, I could not help but look into their eyes and at their smiling faces and wonder what if: what if they only knew what lay ahead in the years to come.

Of the twelve boys in the photo, Hoskins believes that two may not have been in the service. The rest either ended up in the navy, army or army air force. Hoskins was in the navy for 6 years and then worked for I&M Electric Co. for 39 years after his military service.

As Hoskins recalled each young boy in the photo, it became evident, by his broad smile, that it was as much a pleasure to meet the son of his boyhood friend as it was for me to

meet a physical link to the past: a link that somehow made dad alive again as I intently listened to the memories of the 1930s and '40s.

As an historian and writer, I shortly realized that a special story was brewing as Hoskins continued on this sentimental and emotional journey. Five of the boys who attended his 10th birthday party, at 612 East Battell, were not related: Paul Gerard, Dewey Gerard, Leo Foltz, Herb

Lawson Jr. and Chet Gerard. The six other boys were Hoskins' cousins: "Billie" Richards, Dick Hopper, Don Orlosky, Forrest Wenman and Bob George. As I learned about cousin number six, I could not help but look again at the photo and the smiling face of Jimmy Lee Richards. Young Jimmy Lee Richards would die at the Battle of the Bulge in WWII in a little more than seven years.

As former VFW Post 360 Commander Frank Hoskins reflected back on the childhood years, as well as the post WWII years of dad and the others, there developed a mysterious stirring within me to pursue more deeply the life of dad's old neighborhood friend: Jimmy Lee Richards.

Now, being an ex-cop, who graduated 4th in my class of 35 at the academy, I knew that various levels of detective work are vital to any writer, Hoskins gave me the first clue in recalling that there had been a military marker placed in Fairview Cemetery (Mishawaka), but wasn't sure if Jimmy was actually buried there as many WWII casualties were left buried overseas.

It was now firmly evident that I could not turn back on this mysterious call and urge to travel the trail of human interest back into history. I had to know more about dad's childhood friend who never returned alive from WWII, and who never had the chance to continue on with life as did dad and the others.

With the help of staff at Fairview Cemetery, I was shown the location of Jimmy's grave site, then assured he HAD been brought back home and was actually buried in his boyhood hometown on July 27, 1949, almost five years after he had died. As I stood in front of Jimmy's white marble military marker, more clues were at hand as I read the engraving: "Jimmy L. Richards, Indiana, Pvt. 423 INF, 106 DIV, World War II, September 8, 1925 (his birth date), December 21, 1944 (his death date).

It was getting late in the day, so I headed back to Michigan to contemplate the next leg of the journey. Ironically, I was watching the History Channel that night, and realizing that the military show I was viewing had a website, an idea hit me. What if! What if I simply typed in the words Battle of the Bulge, and then clicked on Search? To my surprise, it worked! But where to start and what to pick was now the challenge. As I scrolled down the page, my heart almost stopped.

There it was, an association that was organized to collect and preserve the records, history and memories of the 106th Infantry Division: Jimmy Lee Richards' outfit in WWII. On the military marker, there was absent the specific Company in which Jimmy served. But a great surprise was about to unfold.

Within hours of generating an e-mail, John Kline replied to my quest to know if anyone on his end knew Pvt Jimmy Richards. From Kline's first reply, I learned that he (Kline) had

been in "M Co., 423rd Infantry Regiment, WWII" and is now editor of "The CUB" magazine, a publication for vets who are members of the 106th Inf Div Association. But the real surprise came after several more e-mails and Kline's diligent assistance.

Kline, who maintains a personal diary on the website, discovered that Jimmy was in Company B, and perhaps best of all, Kline e-mailed back a list of current members who were in Company B with Jimmy. From Kline's personal website one learns that "The Battle of the Bulge started on December 16, 1944, in the "heavily forested Ardennes region of eastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg." Three days later, "two of the Regiments, the 422nd and the 423rd (Jimmy's Regiment) were surrounded."

Kline further records that "...the 106th Infantry Division, average age of 22 years, suffered 564 killed in action, 1,246 wounded and 7,001 missing in action at the end of the offensive" which ended on January 25, 1945.

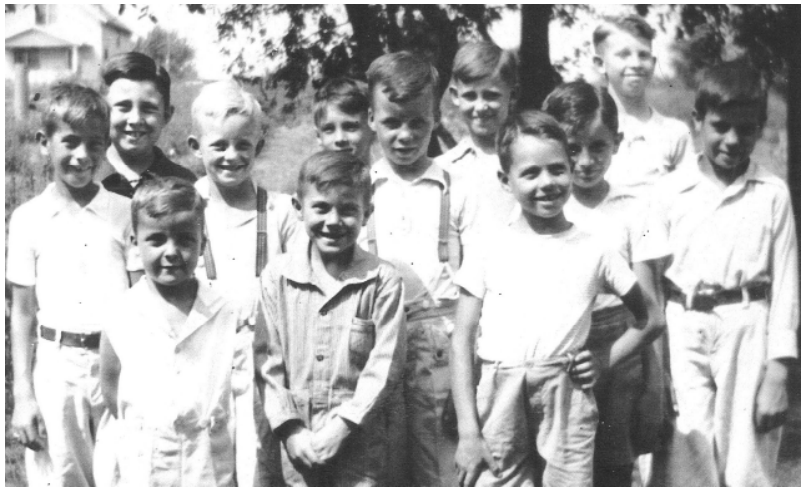
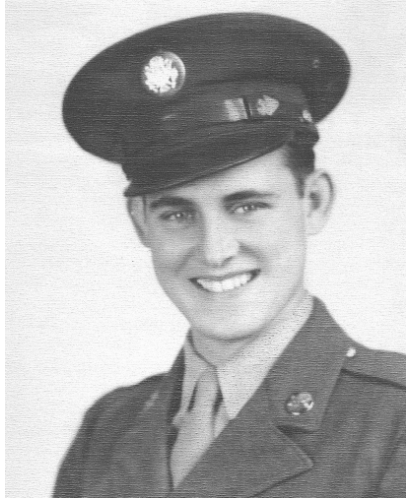
Pvt. Jimmy Lee Richards was one of those killed in action. Thanks to Kline's valuable assistance, I have learned that on "31 July 1945" the U.S. Army, through "General Orders No. 51," issued, posthumously, the "Award of Combat Infantryman Badge" to Pvt. Jimmy Lee Richards.

As my research progressed, another heartbreaking discovery arose in the story of dad's boyhood friend. With the assistance of Mishawaka Librarian Connie Johnston, I learned from the records that Jimmy was married. He had married Louise Ellis on May 29, 1943. Jimmy enlisted on December 13, 1943, and went overseas on October 15, 1944, with Company B., 423rd Infantry.

On December 21, 1944, Pvt\_ Jimmy Lee Richards (Sr.) died----and on December 22, 1944, Jimmy Lee Richards Jr. was born; a son Pvt Richards would never know or ever see or hold.

It was winter when dad's old childhood friend and neighbor died at the hands of the Nazis. And it was in the winter when dad, Jimmy and all the neighborhood children used to sled down the sloping streets of northside Mishawaka. As I look into their eyes and gaze upon the youthful smiles on their faces, I wonder---if only they knew what lay ahead.

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**MILITARY**  
*Organization*

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