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France 1918-2008: Remembering the American Offensive in World War I

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When he learned I was an American he pointed out that our 28th Division took the bridge in 1918 after a week-long fire-fight. "Hundreds of Americans were killed to liberate my village." he said. Then he invited me to his home.

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invitation.

With his little English and my nonexistent French, it is no wonder I misunderstood. It wasn't to his home we went, but down an alley next to the bridge, where I soon found myself in his bread museum.

Outside he had a large German wood-burning oven on wheels which is still towed to events and used. There were also two antique tractors, one French c1957 and the other a 1955 English one. Both were once used to harvest wheat, and both still run!

The inside is more difficult to describe. There was so much stuff packed into one large room that my eyes at first couldn't focus on just one thing. Gradually, though, I discerned a path to follow, beginning with early bread making implements and eventually leading up to the present time.

Here was everything to do with bread under one roof! There were tools and machines for mixing, shaping, baking, twisting, rising, even for harvesting and reaping the wheat.

Everything from animated displays to antique examples of bread making art. I even watched a video in English showing how French bread was made. With floor to ceiling displays it was obvious that bread was truly his passion.

There were some models and images of local windmills where the grain was ground. He told me that



M. Boizard happily explaining the intricate displays in his bread museum in Fismes, France

I found this happening all over France. 2008 is the 90th anniversary of the end of World War I. France has been commemorating the anniversaries of various battles for the last four years, but through this Summer and Fall many more take place until the culmination of ceremonies on November 11th.

Everywhere I went the French people treated me as if I'd been in the Verdun trenches with them. Forget what you might have heard about the French.

They remember the World Wars better than we do. After all, the fighting happened in their door yards! They haven't forgotten America's help winning them, either. I was received warmly wherever I went. And so, I accepted Mr Boizard's



In the Bread Museum in Fismes, France, the floor to ceiling displays made it obvious that bread was truly M. Boizard's passion.

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in World War I the Germans machine-gunned the blades off the windmills because the French Resistance used them to point out where enemy bunkers were hidden and munitions stored.



In the Bread Museum in Fismes, France, Mr Boizard collected everything to do with bread under one roof!

That meant the French were often without flour for bread until the American liberation. That explained why he also had three flour sacks on display labeled US FLOUR.

The soldiers who saved the village brought the ingredients for the French staff of life - bread - and there's nothing more important to a Frenchman. No wonder they were treated like heroes!

Over flutes of champagne he showed off his proudest memento. It was the newspaper account of his induction into La Commanderie de France des Talmeliers Bon Pain, the organization of French bread lovers.

His homage to bread, his museum, earned him an honorary membership in this prestigious fraternity of bakers. It also earns him mention here as a man monument to bread.

who followed his passion to create an incredible

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I Met A Man Who Loved America

It was cold and raining when I pulled into the muddy parking area of the Moreau Valley Camp. Men in rain gear and antique uniforms milled around the other vehicles getting ready to recreate the life of the soldiers in WW I.

They were part of a re-enactors group that had refurbished the original power station, showers, and underground passages of a fortified German position in Marne on the Western Front. I was joining them to experience life in the trenches.

My French guide through the labyrinth of tunnels had the unlikely name of Serge Tourovsky. He explained his last name by saying that he indeed was French, but with a Russian father. During the course of the morning he changed from German, into French and finally American uniforms as we ducked through dripping passages, exploring the securely constructed compound.

Several times we emerged onto a hillside with a small stream coursing along the base. Down the slope were terraces off which corrugated metal roofed rooms were dug into the earth. Most held two sets of bunk beds, but one was a delousing room and one was made of concrete, divided into shower rooms for officers and enlisted men.

At the base was a latrine, a laundry area, and mess room. This was an efficiently designed and highly fortified little village. Viewing it, I began to understand why it was so difficult for the Allied forces to remove the entrenched German army.

Serge was joined by his son, 10-year-old Geoffrey, also in uniform. He nonchalantly field-stripped his weapon, a lethal-looking toy replica pistol, and looked in every respect like a little soldier.



WW I reenactor Serge Tourovsky eerily recreates the vision of a German soldier in the tunnels of Moreau Valley Camp.

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Geoffrey Tourovsky at Moreau Valley Camp

It was unnerving to see father and son together, an armed and uniformed Mutt and Jeff team, pulling me visually into the WW I era with every turn in the trenches. It gave me the shivers! I blamed it on the cold rain and ducked into the mess bunker for hot coffee. Over steaming cups of strong French brew Serge told me about the Camp.

"We reenact French life in the trenches for the tourists. On Saturdays from July through September we have the sound of artillery along with the flashing lights of explosions to really give them the effect of battle. After that it will be the 2nd and fourth Sundays."

He said, "We cleaned and reconstructed the camp for free. We perform for the pleasure of sharing our history."

The coffee was warming, but my shivers persisted. The zeal I saw in his eyes reminded me of the quote in an old history book, "That our children may be patriots we tell them of our fathers."

Everywhere I traveled along the World War I battle front I found men like Serge. Men whose families were affected by the war; men who couldn't let the struggle for freedom to be forgotten. He stressed that France would not be free without the help of the

Americans.

As I was getting ready to leave he added this sentiment, "You are all in our hearts. May your soldiers be safe and home soon. When the time comes for the French to shed blood for our allies - we are ready. God Bless America!"

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