

Articles from  
The Jewish  
**Veteran**

The Official Publication of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Volume: 55, Year: 2002 · Number: 4, Season: Summer

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## Lest we forget Jews at American Military Cemeteries

By Jacob Weinberger, LCDR, USNR and Rita C. Altman, COL., USMCR(Ret).

In 2001 while driving on the Rome - Milano A-1 Autostrada en route to 11 Falciani outside of Florence (Firenze), we passed the American WWII Cemetery in Greve, Italy. Its location was previously unknown to us and we lacked time for visiting it. However, we made a vow that when next we returned to Italy, the Cemetery was a "must do" item. Spring of 2002, on our trip to Tuscany, we visited the Cemetery.



The opaque jade green Greve river gently winds its way through its namesake town of Greve inheriting its lush color from the abundant trees, bushes and flowering plants along its banks.

As it comes to the American Cemetery it parallels a narrow roadway, far distanced from the Rome-Milano A-1 autostrada. Here the Greve respectfully maintains silence, its well trimmed grass banks now pass under a gleaming white concrete and marble bridge that links the entrance to the cemetery. A wide arc access road delivers the visitor to a gracious entry area. Flanking both sides before the bridge are two small white houses, one a visitor reception area and the other the office of the caretaker, Superintendent Piero R.

The visitor's lounge and reception room is tastefully and subduedly decorated. Notably, a framed plaque memorializes the names of veterans buried here who have been awarded the Medal of Honor for their combat heroism. Also, in its own wall niche, is a framed Purple Heart and proclamation from President Lyndon B. Johnson honoring all those buried here as recipients of the coveted Purple Heart.

Crossing the bridge, the entry roadway divides into a perimeter access that encircles the area. At that point, a wide swath of green grass is flanked by gravel paths on each side that rise in an upward slope to the central monument area. On each side, almost as far as the eye can see, ordered rows of headstones of pristine white marble Crosses and Stars of David stand at attention in military formation. Both vertically and horizontally across the gentle green slopes, they are alongside each other by name, in fellowship and comradeship, not by rank - - equal in death as were equal in life. Interspersed are markers bearing the inscription, "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God".

Among the 4,300 grave markers we saw many Stars of David amidst the Crosses. Headstones of the Jewish faith are tapered marble shafts surmounted by a Star of David. Inscribed on the face is the name, rank, unit, home state and date of death in action. Seventy-eight Jewish men and one woman who had given their lives in combat for our country now rest here eternally. We recited the Kaddish and placed flowers. The following are some of the names we observed:

Julian Rodner, 2nd Lt. 484 Bomber Group, New York, 2-20-45 Gertrude Temkin, American Red Cross, Ohio, 8-3-45  
Arnold Mechenberg, Pvt. 350 Infantry, 85th Division, New York, 9-28-44 Morris Kruger, PFC, 101 Division, Ohio,

4-19-45 Herbert Friedman, Sgt., 1st Armored Division, Missouri, 6-25-44 The American dead buried at Falciani account for 31 % of those killed in battle. The remainder were returned home to the United States at the family's request. Final burial in foreign and stateside American Military Cemeteries was, and is, at the option of the nearest of kin, within a two year period after death.

Supervision of American Military Cemeteries is under the aegis of the American Battle Monument Commission (ABMC), an independent agency of the Executive Branch of our government, responsible for commemorating services of all Armed Forces of the USA. ABMC operates, administers and maintains 24 permanent American Military Cemeteries, 21 separate monuments and 3 markers on foreign soil throughout the world. Since WWII, 124,914 war dead are interred in these Cemeteries, 93,243 from WWII. An additional 94,132 men and women of WWII missing in action or buried at sea are listed in memorials in the regions of battle of WWII, Korea and Viet Nam. The ABMC was created by an act of Congress in 1923 in recognition of the need to respect and care for those who fell on foreign soil serving our country. During and after WWII, several hundred temporary burial sites were established by the US Army in Europe and the Pacific areas. In 1947, fourteen sites were selected to be final resting places by the Army and ABMC, to correspond with the course of military and naval operations. The permanent sites were established by the American Graves Registration Service and then turned over to ABMC for perpetual care and maintenance. By agreement with the host countries, all sites have been granted to the USA free of all charges and taxation in perpetuity. Maintenance and service is maintained by annual budget grants by the Congress to the ABMC.

WWII Cemeteries and Monuments may be found in Europe, the Pacific and the United States. The two fold intent of this article is to draw attention to those comrades who still lay overseas. As many of us now extend our travel for pleasure activities on tours all over the world, there may well be an opportunity to visit an ABMC cemetery and to our pay respects to our former buddies, friends, or family members. Before going on that trip or tour to Rome, Paris or Honolulu or wherever, write to the American Battle Monuments Commission, Court House Plaza 11, Suite 500, 2300 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201. Website [www.abmc.com](http://www.abmc.com) and check out the location of a cemetery near where you will be.

Second, a proposal. Perhaps many of our Jewish War Veterans posts may adopt a cemetery as a project. Contact ABMC and obtain the Superintendent's name. Write a letter supporting his ABMC effort. Each year Congress looks to cut the budget of ABMC, "costs too much to maintain". Write and tell your Congressman and Congresswoman to endorse and support ABMC "Lest we forget". Jewish War Veterans do not forget their own. The Stars of David stand proudly at attention in every American Military Cemetery. © Jacob Weinberger, LCDR, USNR and Rita C. Altman, COL., USMCR(Ret). July, 2002. Philadelphia, PA. All rights reserved. Printed by permission.

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## Generations

By Gloria Abramowitz, Army Brat and Spouse

Location. Location. Location. Fortunately for a synagogue in the Bavarian town of Ansbach, Germany, this first commandment of real estate is what saved the 300 year old building from destruction. Its survival began the link between it and the Abramowitz family over four generations.

During Kristallnacht in 1938, plans were in motion to destroy this simple but beautiful place of worship for the Jews of Ansbach. But as many of the locals today will proudly tell you, the Ansbach Fire Department stepped in and saved the building from destruction. While the synagogue was saved, the fire department did not act out of kindness as some of the townspeople would like to believe. Their motivation was the synagogue's location. Nearly all the buildings in downtown Ansbach are arranged side by side in long rows and the synagogue happens to sit right in the middle of one

of these rows. Had the Germans torched the synagogue as planned, one by one, the town's other buildings would have caught fire and burned to the ground as well. The synagogue was saved but desecrated nonetheless. It was used by the Germans as a warehouse and stable until the war's end.

Immediately after the war ended the U.S. Army decided to set up its European Signal School in Ansbach and named LTC Reuben Abramowitz as the first commandant. He was also the first installation commander of Ansbach. This was quite an achievement for Reuben who had fled the Ukraine with his parents and come to the United States as a refugee child only four decades earlier. He entered the Army at the age of 14 with only a 4th grade education. By the end of his 17th year, young Reuben was already a war veteran by having served in the Mexican Border Conflict and in France with the 1st Trench Mortar Battery of the 1st Infantry Division during WWI.

In 1946, Reuben's wife, Olga, and son, Benjamin, joined him in Ansbach. (Oddly enough several of Olga's cousins who had survived the Holocaust were in the Bleidorn Displaced Persons Camp that was in Reuben's area of command.) Ben was twelve years old at the time and studying to become a bar mitzvah the following year. LTC Abramowitz decided to make the local German government restore the Ansbach Synagogue- at their expense- to its original condition. The Germans complied and in October of 1947, Benjamin Abramowitz, became the first U.S. military dependent to become a bar mitzvah in Germany after WWII.

After LTC Abramowitz and his family returned to the United States, the connection between the Ansbach Synagogue and the Abramowitz family lay dormant for the next half century. Reuben retired after 35 years of service to his country. His son, Ben, also made the Army his career and served proudly as an infantry officer for 28 years.

The tradition of Abramowitzs serving their country continued as Ben's oldest son, David, graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1982 but took his commission with the Army. As Ben often says, "He saw the light." In 1997, David received orders notifying him that he would command the 1st Infantry Division's Apache Helicopter Battalion. As fate would have it, the battalion, 1-1 AVN, was located in Ansbach, Germany. This battalion included Delta Company which David's father had been the service platoon leader of two decades earlier when it was the 1st Aviation Company of the 1st Infantry Division.

David, along with his wife, two daughters and son, Jacob, arrived in Ansbach in December of 1997. Jacob, like his grandfather fifty years earlier, was also of bar mitzvah age. The newly arrived Abramowitzs found the Ansbach Synagogue still standing but locked, as access to it required special permission from the city. A brass plaque outside the synagogue mistakenly stated it had been restored several years after the correct date of 1947. There was no viable Jewish community in Ansbach and the synagogue served only as a historical tourist site because of its baroque architecture. No Jewish service had been held there since Ben's bar mitzvah except for interfaith memorial services on Kristallnacht. Nevertheless, the city of Ansbach gave the Abramowitz family their full cooperation and access to the synagogue.

Studying for your bar mitzvah is never easy but consider the additional difficulties encountered when you are part of the only Jewish family on post and the only Army rabbi in Germany is stationed three hours away. The critical and time consuming mission of preparing Jacob fell to his father. It became David's second job in addition to battalion command and training 1-1 AVN for its upcoming deployment to Kosovo.

On July 3rd, 1999 the Ansbach Synagogue was once again filled with Jewish prayer and song as Jacob was called to read from the Torah. He stood on the same stone and marble bimah, centered in the middle of the synagogue, that his grandpa had read from fifty-two years earlier. As Jacob's Grandpa Ben, Cousin Larry Hartstein (who was born in the Bleidorn Displaced Person's Camp) and nearly one hundred other Germans, Czechs and American friends and family looked on, the connection between the Ansbach Synagogue and the Abramowitz family was joined once again.

When interviewed by the local German newspaper, Colonel/Grandpa Ben called it “kismet” that his grandson became a bar mitzvah in the Ansbach Synagogue. He is hoping Jacob will decide to carry on the family tradition of service to his country and make it four continuous generations of Abramowitzs that have served in the 1st Infantry Division -The Big Red One.

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## When I Really Needed a Friend

By Arthur Miller

I grew up in the town of New Canaan, Connecticut (pop. 5,000), where we had only six Jewish families. New Canaan and Darien, Connecticut, were the two towns mentioned in “Gentlemen’s Agreement.” But I was so busy growing up during the Depression, playing ball and having a great time, that I was completely oblivious to the blatant Anti-Semitism that evidently was swirling all around New Canaan.

I was attending the University of Connecticut on a football scholarship (half- tuition). The tuition at that time was \$125.00 per year so my big scholarship amounted to \$62.50 per year. Years later, when I told my son how much my football scholarship came to, his comment was that I was probably overpaid. During my sophomore year, on December 7, 1941, I was in the library studying for an exam when a student rushed in with the news that Pearl Harbor had just been attacked.

I completed that semester, and in February, 1942, I enlisted in the Navy V-5 program which was pilot training. In flight school I became best friends with two Jewish boys and we became inseparable. The three of us were together all through flight school, and we finally received our wings as Marine Corps pilots. I flew a Corsair or F4U. When we finally arrived at Miramar, California, a Marine Corps embarkation base, my two Jewish friends were ordered back to Corpus Christie, Texas, as flight instructors. My orders were to proceed to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, as a replacement pilot.

I shipped out on a Merchant Marine liberty ship with nine other replacement pilots, who were all real Red Necks from the deep South. The trip took twenty two days, and all we could do was read and play poker. When you play poker for several days, some of the fellows started telling jokes, and many of these jokes had anti-Semitic innuendoes. I was in a dilemma. They had no idea that I was Jewish. Should I just grin and bear it, or should I start swinging. I decided to bite my tongue and keep quiet, but on the third or fourth day, one of them told a particularly offensive anti-Semitic joke and I flipped my lid.

I stood up and said, “Look guys, I happen to be Jewish and I really resent these G-D damn jokes”. They were absolutely shocked. They apologized profusely, and after that, there no more anti-Semitic jokes, at least not in front of me. However, the experience told me that I didn’t want to be buddies with any of these nine guys. After arriving at Guadalcanal, I was assigned to join my permanent squadron (VMF 222) on Green Island, a small island with a fighter strip, just off the northern tip of Bougainville.

Shortly after arriving at VMF 222, I was told that the flight surgeon, Dr. Joseph Poticia, wanted to see me. The Doctor’s job was to interview me to see if I was psychologically prepared for combat flying. At that particular time I was a complete basket case. I was scared stiff because I realized that now I was going to be flying real combat missions. I was terribly home sick, and most of all, I felt I was really all alone out there, without a true friend. When I was taken to the doctor’s tent, he was about thirty eight years old and I was only nineteen. To me, he was like a middle aged man. He had me sit down in front of his desk, while he looked over my medical record, which of course included my religion.

He got up and walked to the front of his desk, stood next to me and said the most beautiful word that anybody could have said to me at that time. He said, "Lantzman". I was so shocked to hear him say that, I stood up to shake hands with him. He threw his arms around me, and I was so emotionally drained that I started crying uncontrollably. He hugged me like a father would hug a son. This was undoubtedly the most emotional moment I had ever experienced; meeting a fellow Jew out there in the jungle on the other side of the world.

Of course, if the doctor was a real friend, he would have said, "This kid is a little unstable. We better send him back to the States." But no, he stated for the record that I was perfect for combat and ready to go.