



Stories of Allied Soldiers from Nuremberg-Fürth: Stephen S. Mosbacher

(1923 - K.I.A. 1945)



Stephen S. Mosbacher

(photo: adoptiegraven-database.nl)

Sigmund Mosbacher was born in Nuremberg on October 14, 1923 as the son of the gynecologist Dr. Emil Mosbacher (1886 - 1973, see also his biography on *rijo-research.de*) and his first wife Anna Schweizer who died less than three years after his birth.

Sigmund attended school until the 1935 Nuremberg Laws forced Jewish children into segregated schools. From what his stepsister Marianne (born in 1933) remembers, he was a gifted student and deeply interested in literature and languages from an early age. He was also very interested in Jewish history and culture. Academics present only small challenges to him and he possessed an unusually mature intellect. A cousin once remarked that because of the circumstances, Sigmund never really had a chance to be a teenager but was forced into maturity early on. He always had his nose in a book. He didn't believe in wasting time.

In October 1938 the family - Sigmund, his father, his stepmother Rosa Neumann and stepsister - fled from the persecution by the Nazis to the USA. Many members of the extended family who did not succeed in leaving Europe fell victim to the Holocaust.

Sigmund Americanized his first name to Stephen and attended Newton High School in Jackson Heights, Queens (NY). After school he worked in a market next door to the family's fur-

nished apartment in Kew Gardens. He made excellent grades and received a scholarship to the University of North Dakota in Fargo, but he returned to Toledo (OH) where the family had moved in the spring of 1940. He attended the university there and was majoring in chemistry when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Stephen enlisted in the U.S. Army. He started as a PFC but was made a Staff Sergeant in due course. Among others he was stationed at Camp Ritchie and sent overseas to England in September 1944.

In the winter of 1944/45 Stephen was billeted in Margraten (Netherlands) at the home of the Vronen family. According to the Vronens, Stephen sensed that he would not live through the war. He did not show his fear to his army comrades nor was there the slightest indication in any of his letters to his parents which were always cheerful and optimistic. In one of them he had the idea of remaining in Germany to work for the postwar occupation administration which he thought would very quickly devolve from a military to a civilian operation.

In late December 1944 his commanding officer gave him a leave to Paris where he met a close friend of the Mosbacher family (see letter below). She had lived through the occupation in Paris under very difficult circumstances.

The events after Stephen's unit crossed into Germany are described in the following letter to his father by his former commanding officer:

9 June 1946

Dear Mr. Mosbacher:

I must apologize for the long delay in writing this letter. My only excuse is that I was unable to secure your address until the first of this month.

While it is not a pleasant matter to renew an old grief and sense of loss, I am writing in the belief that you would like to hear from a friend of your son Stephen, who was with him at the time of his death and who was a witness to his courage.

Stephen was a member of a "Prisoner-of-War Interrogation Team", a specialist detail which was assigned to us shortly after we arrived in France. At that time, I was the S-2 (Intelligence Officer) of Combat Command B, 8th Armored Division, and consequently this team was assigned to my section.

Soldiers are slow to accept new comrades, but your son soon made a place for himself, receiving the nickname "Moose" - partly because of the soldier habit of shortening names,

partly because of his size. He was also reputed to have the biggest appetite in our headquarters company and to be always the first man in the mess line.

In our first actions in Holland, and later in the crossing of the Ruhr River and the drive to the Rhine, he began to acquire an excellent reputation for courage and cheerful efficiency under all conditions. For this, I managed to secure a week's leave in Paris for him. He must have had an excellent time because he almost shook my hand off while thanking me on his return.

Later we crossed the Rhine, and our misfortunes began.

One of the most difficult and generally unpleasant assignments which we staff personnel had to perform was that of billeting. It involved moving into towns - often before the enemy troops had ceased fighting - to find buildings capable of sheltering our own men and of providing the necessary additional space for offices, kitchens, and the like. The detachments assigned this mission were small and lightly armed. There were no more clearly defined frontlines as our armored divisions drove forward; the enemy was wherever we went - usually bewildered and willing to surrender, but occasionally eager and anxious to fight.

Captain Stout, who had been acting as billeting officer for our combat command, was killed by a mine on the evening of the second day after we crossed the Rhine. Thereafter I took care of the billeting, in addition to my other duties. Since my knowledge of German was almost zero, it was necessary for one of the Interrogation Team to accompany me as an interpreter. Your son always volunteered for that duty and was invaluable.

On the night of 2 April we were advancing towards the Elbe River. However, an attempt by the German 116th Panzer Division to break out of the Ruhr pocket to the south caused a change in our orders. I was ordered to take a billeting party into the city of Lippstadt. A squadron of mechanized cavalry and a platoon of military police were supposed to be marching ahead of us.

Naturally, due to the sudden change of orders in the middle of the night on strange roads, there was confusion. Dawn found my billeting party very much alone at the head of the division. The cavalry had gotten into a fight before the change in orders and had not been able to disengage. The military police had been delayed due to the crowded roads.

For better or for worse, I decided to keep going, since we were the only advance detachment left in front of the main body of the division. We moved out carefully, your son questioning all the slave laborers we met along the road and all of the prisoners we gathered up. We took two towns - Delbrück and Sande - and captured two small outposts. At the third town, Neu-

haus, we found a garrison of about eighty men. They didn't want to fight very badly. We were disarming them and taking the place over, when a SS outfit came into the town from the opposite direction. The resulting fight was rather rough, but we held them until they brought up their tanks. Then, since we had no weapon heavier than a machine gun, we had to go.

Your son had been riding in another jeep, but he stayed behind with my driver - a recruit named Smith - and me, to help us cover the withdrawal of the rest of the billeting detachment. He did this, I must emphasize, of his own free will, because he was a good soldier and not afraid.

For a minute it looked as if we had succeeded. Then I noticed that one of our men had been left behind. He was running frantically across the field with several black-jacket SS troopers at his heels. I shouted to Smith to stop, jumped out of the jeep and began to shoot at the SS men. Smith and your son, however, turned the jeep around and went right down into the advancing Germans to pick the man up, firing as they went. Sergeant Mosbacher was laughing as he went; I could hear his laughter above all of the shooting and shouting.

Have a split-second memory of how the running soldier's face lit up with happiness as Stephen caught his hand and pulled him into the jeep. Don't understand exactly how I happened to see it - was very busy shooting at the time, and there were plenty of targets.

Jumped onto the radiator of the jeep as it came back past me. We shot our way out. Thought again that we had gotten away with it. But, as we went back out of the town, saw one of our light trucks wrecked alongside the road. A shot from the German tank which was firing down the road had wrecked its front wheels. A wounded man was beside it. We pulled up to try to save him too. It was then that the tank hit us.

Having your jeep hit by a high-velocity shell is something you can't describe. It was a glare of white light and a screaming crash. Then we were in the ditch. Smith and I were wounded, Stephen and the rescued soldier were dead. Stephen was still smiling and still had a firm grip on his submachine gun.

There isn't much more to tell. Was captured soon thereafter, placed in a German hospital, and had that same hospital surrendered to me the next morning. Smith recovered from his wound after a couple of months: he was my driver again while our division was in Czechoslovakia.

Recommended your son for the Distinguished Service Cross. As you know, he received the Silver Star (the next lower decoration) instead. Was in the hospital again - this time with yel-

low jaundice - at the time the substitution was made, so was unaware of it. Would have created a fuss otherwise.

I understand that he is buried in the US military cemetery at Margraten, Holland. A Dutch family, with whom I stayed while we were there before our first battle, writes me every now and then. They have offered to take care of the graves of any of my friends who were buried there, so have asked them to take care of Stephen's. Their last letter stated that they had made application for that purpose with the cemetery authorities. The Dutch have been consistently grateful for our help and have gotten along splendidly with our troops, so there is not the slightest doubt but that this family will tend your son's grave with care and devotion.

Your son was a brave and honorable soldier. He was greatly missed, both because he was our best interpreter and interrogator and because of his constant good humor and comradeship. I have heard the same soldiers, who once "kidded" him about always being the first man in the mess line, speak of him with deep regret.

We served together, several times in dangerous and exacting missions. He was always willing, always cheerful, always reliable, always brave. There are not too many other men of whom the same can be said. This expression of regret and sympathy is delayed, but is deeply sincere.

I shall always remember this of him - that he spurned safety to fight beside me in the most desperate moment of life - that he was not afraid - that he died trying to save others - and that he died laughing in death's very face.

Few men, who lived out a full, smug lifetime in comfort and safety, did as much:

*"As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free -". [Quote from *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*]*

If I can be of any further service to you, please let me know. I am -

Respectfully yours,

s/ John R. Elting

Major, FA

Tactics Dept, The Armored School

Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Stephen *Moose* Mosbacher, Staff Sergeant with Combat Command B, 8th Armored Division, Intelligence Staff was awarded for his bravery with the Silver Star and the Purple Heart and is buried in the American War Cemetery in Margraten, plot I, row 11, grave 19.

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Casualty List Includes 1 Toledoan Dead, 4 Hurt

**2 Other Northwestern Ohio Servicemen,
2 of Michigan Reported Killed in Action**

Casualty lists made public today reported one Toledo, two other northwestern Ohio and two southern Michigan men as killed in action; four Toledo, seven other northwestern Ohio and four southern Michigan men as wounded and one Toledo and another northwestern Ohioan as prisoners of Germany.

Killed in Action

STAFF SERGT. S. S. MOSBACHER

Dr. and Mrs. Emil Mosbacher, 617 Eleanor Ave., who left Germany's



S. S. Mosbacher

persecution and unhappiness for America in 1938, were notified yesterday of the death of their only son, Staff Sergt. Stephen S., in action in Germany April 2. With the 8th Armored Division's intelligence staff, Sergeant Mosbacher, who was 21, had been overseas since September.

The Mosbacher family, parents, son, and daughter, Marianne, came to Toledo in 1940. Life in their homeland had become unbearable when persecution progressed to a point where Dr. Mosbacher was forced to discontinue his practice of medicine, relatives said.

Sergeant Mosbacher attended high school in New York and was majoring in chemistry at the University of Toledo before entering the service.

Article from a Toledoan newspaper about the death of Stephen S. Mosbacher

(Source: Leo Baeck Institute NYC)

Sources

- Nuremberg City Archives holdings C 21/VII # 108 & C 21/X # 6
- Leo Baeck Institute NYC, Mosbacher Collection (<http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=1875025#serII>)
- Correspondence with Mrs. Marianne Mosbacher Flack and Mr. Frank Harris 2008 - 2011
- <http://adoptiegraven-database.nl>

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