

Grave of Michalk's Son, Missing in Action, Located

The following letter from the Rev. A. F. Michalk in France was sent to Paul Nerger.

The letter speaks for itself.

Memorial Day Service
U. S. Military Cemetery, Neuville-En-Condroz, Belgium
May 30, 1952

(With grateful appreciation to the U. S. Graves Registration Division.)

Of the many military cemeteries our government is maintaining in Europe, the large one at Neuville-en-Condroz is of special interest to us, because our son, 1st Lieut. Paul L. Michalk, has finally found a resting place there in Plot C, Row 21, Grave 5.

For six long years we knew only that he was "missing in action." Our government had notified us that his plane had been shot down over Northern Germany on April 7, 1945. A few of his buddies who had managed to parachute to safety told what they knew. There was no chance for Paul and the others who had been up in front when the Messerschmidt swooped down on that first plane of the formation and exploding upon colliding. The few men who were in the rear had time to bail out. So we knew before our Government reported him 'presumed to be dead,' as of April 8, 1946, that he was no longer among the living.

But when our church sent us a call to come over to France to serve a pastorate for a few years, mother and I accepted that call and came in the fall of 1948. The silent hope that we might possibly someday chance to find over here some trace of our son's body, had much to do with our accepting that call. Our government had given us a general description of the section of Europe where the plane must have come down. But we would never have hoped to experience what actually happened later.

The untiring and painstaking efforts of the U. S. Graves Registration Division discovered a mass grave at Gestacht. There were seven bodies of American soldiers in that grave. They exhumed them and brought them to Neuville-en-Condroz and interred them as unknown. The peculiar circumstances, however, led our faithful department to examine the records more closely. An anthropologist was employed to examine the remains of these seven graves a bit closer. So, one day there came a letter informing us that our son's body had been positively identified, and asked us whether we would want the body brought home to Texas or have it interred here in a Military Cemetery over in Europe.

After considering carefully what to do, we decide that it would be best to choose the latter. We did request, if possible, that we might attend the committal service, choosing Chaplain Lindemann of Frankfurt to read the burial service. That request was readily granted, and every courtesy was shown us on that occasion last year.

So after six long years we did hold a sad reunion once more on Neuville-en-Condroz. A cold steady rain enveloped the small procession and somehow shut out everything around us and let us concentrate on the solemn words: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the glorious hope of a final resurrection unto life through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The lads who folded that flag and gave it to mother tried to get as much of the rain out but it was soaking wet as we lodged in Arlon for the night.

We did not have much desire to look around a bit on that occasion.

This year, however, we planned to attend the Memorial Service. Our oldest son, a missionary to India is spending a couple of weeks with us on his furlough trip to the States. He and his daughter were with us then as we drove down the well-marked road that led to the huge cemetery. We came pretty early, for we did not know the time for services. We were warmly greeted by the 'Caretaker who still remembered us from last year and his assistant.

The weather, this time, was more agreeable. We had plenty of time to walk around. We soon found the little white cross among all the 5,000 which meant most to us. We noticed that much progress had been made in preparation for the little Italian Marble crosses that will soon replace the wooden ones, and so give more permanence.

The little flags at the head of each grave, one American and one Belgian, were lustily fluttering in the breeze, somehow giving the impression that all these boys here knew there were many visitors coming this day and they were to celebrate with them. Little Audrey could not understand why her father and grandfather and grandmother were in tears while taking pictures and of us could tell her at the time about her uncle Paul whom

she never saw in her young life. She saw the Belgian soldiers on parade, and the little Belgian children putting flowers on graves (she calls them by the Tamil name "poohs") she jumped when the honor guard fired the volleys and all. It was very interesting.

But for us it was probably a last, last farewell to this world.

We had all done it bravely enough down there on the railroad station platform in Giddings, Texas We were all so proud of our young Lieutenant in his snappy uniform. He was leaving for the East Coast and England. He did not like the fogs of the long winter months in England. But he had almost finished his 50 arduous missions and longed to be back in the States soon after Easter, 1945.

Our son, the Rev. Theo. Michalk, and his family will soon sail for the States. Mother and I may be here in France another year. It will probably not happen again that we get up to Neuville-en-Condroz. We should like to see everything in that big cemetery when the plans are completed. But, even the Italian marble crosses, with all the care our Government is giving them will someday perish. The old, old trees that flank the scenic spot on the left have seen several generations of men come and go. Yet they too are not eternal. A grateful Belgium will probably repeat for decades its homage on Memorial Days. And that Star Spangled Banner, long may it wave also over spots like these here and there in this troubled world where American boys have found a last resting place.

In sincere gratitude,

yours,

Rev. A. F. Michalk

Mrs. Michalk and children