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PARIS—First Lt. Sam Magill got back into Paris at the same time as Venus de Milo. Sam once had to guard the armless lady when the French had her hidden away in the Chateau de Valencay, but he never got a chance to see what she looked like. That was because he got busy trying to convince 83d Division headquarters, 100 miles behind him, that he had 20,000 Germans that wanted to surrender. Sam succeeded, and the Ohio state assembly voted to make him an official state hero.

The lieutenant does not wear that laurel lightly, but he feels that all his personal publicity may have obscured the fact that he got famous—with his picture in all the mags and newspapers—because he commanded an Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon that was made up of “the best damn characters I ever met up with.” The saga of Sam Magill, he insists, is not complete without a few little-known details like the affair with Venus, the 22 million gallons of liquor he once dished out to GIs and the time his platoon turned up a live submarine.

These things came out while Sam was sitting in a joint that has the dirtiest glasses and the most beautiful women in Paris and a waiter who got out of Buchenwald a few months ago. The waiter reminded Sam of the time his boys liberated a concentration camp full of Dutch political prisoners, and the women reminded him that his platoon had left a trail of broken



The Saga of Sam Magill

have sagged to the bottom if Gen. Macon hadn't showed up to accept the German general's surrender, Sam said. His arrival proved that the feat was something out of the ordinary.

SAM watched a couple of girls at the bar who were complaining to the barkeep that the black market price on a pair of shoes was up to 6,000 francs. Then Sam said:

“It's always different when you come back. I've got some of the boys in Paris with me, and last night we went out to see some French friends we met when we were fighting. I guess they aren't doing so well. Anyway they tried to sell us some trinkets they make for a 1,000 francs. And we stopped at a little town in Luxembourg where we had a lot of friends, and it was off limits because of typhus.”

A flight officer got up from a nearby table and left the cafe, and then Sam told the story of how the AAF had flown a mission to protect Venus de Milo and never knew it. This happened when the retreating German columns in the Romorantin area started to use a road that led by the chateau where Venus and other priceless treasures of the Louvre were cached. Tactically, the fate of the works of art was secondary in importance to the fact that the Germans were headed towards Sam's CP, but he sent back for an air mission and the AAF obliged by spattering the German column all over the road.

“If the truth has to be known,” Sam said, “most of the boys were more interested in the fact that the chateau which sheltered Venus also had a zoo with antelopes and gazelles and a big bird cage with storks and flamingoes. The

That capture of 20,000 German prisoners is only half the story of the platoon led by Ohio's official state hero.

hearts behind them from Normandy to where they stopped fraternizing, by the numbers.

“Marino was the best with the girls,” said the slim, sandy-haired lieutenant. “And while all the boys did all right in France—married men excepted, naturally—they seemed to like the girls in Luxembourg best. And I can't agree with these newspaper fellows who write that Russian girls are strictly business—not after we met those Red girl lieutenants near the Elbe.”

His platoon, Sam said, had cosmopolitan tastes because they were a cosmopolitan outfit. A lot of the boys spoke several languages, and a joe called “Wisebird” could rattle off seven different tongues. This made it easy for the platoon to collect 90 FFI members around St. Malo and assign them to ground duty while the I & R bunch rode around the coast in motor boats. That was when they flushed that sub.

Sam's platoon gathered characters at each contact with a resistance movement. One by one they attached themselves: a French sergeant who had been in the Foreign Legion, a Belgian lieutenant from the Second Lancers, a French Air Corps officer and a French paratrooper that everyone called Charley and three Poles. These three, known as Alex, John and Jake, were in the German army when they were picked up, but they declared that they didn't like the Nazis anyway and signed up with Sam.

“We were the United Nations,” Sam said, “all except the Russians. And we met them later. Were you ever kissed by 50 Cossacks? I was.”

Sam sipped his wine and said that it couldn't come up to the wine they used to get in Brittany. And that reminded him of the time in Brittany that somebody got the idea of dressing French-speaking members of the platoon in priests' clothes and sending them into German positions to get information. That started the boys off in a contest to see who could act most like a secret agent in a spy movie. A couple of pfc.s, both named Jim, won the contest. They drove a jeep into German-held Nevers, parked the vehicle in a garage and checked in for a night's sleep at the best hotel in town.

Sam admitted that there must be several thousand lieutenants in Paris on pass who believed that their platoons were the best that ever stood pay call, but he was ready to match his men against anyone's, especially in the matter of press clippings. He started dragging out clippings from his pockets.

He told about John, the guy who got so teed-off about snipers in Normandy that he started flushing Jerries by standing up and daring them

to shoot at him. That worked swell, Sam said, until they hit him.

Then there was Berner, a big one with a handlebar mustache who came to Europe from the Aleutians. Berner drove a jeep slowly up a road in Germany so that an enemy tank would pot-shot at him and expose its position. It worked and Berner lived to tell about it.

The lieutenant said he knew he was going to stir up a lot of argument, but to the best of his knowledge his men were in the first patrol to cross the Rhine. The place was Dusseldorf. There could be no argument, however, about the artistic strain that flowed in his outfit. It was brought out by the beauty of Luxembourg's “little Switzerland” country. The boys made panoramic sketches of Jerry pill boxes nestling in the snowclad hills so the artillery could lay a lovely pattern of steel on them.

And, of course, there was always that matter of the 20,000 prisoners, a fair haul for a platoon of 36 men. Altogether their prisoner bag was 22,000, including those taken later.

That big deal sounded good in the clippings, but there were some angles that weren't so well covered. For instance, after sheep-herding the 20,000 pistol-packin', watch-wearing Krauts 100 miles back toward the U.S. lines, Sam's platoon wound up with a souvenir total amounting only to two Lugers and one set of binoculars. The platoon was too busy worrying that the Jerries might change their mind to think about souvenirs during the long trip. Then the next thing they knew, the MPs had taken over, and the platoon was out on the rag end.

In that famous mass surrender at Romorantin, Sam himself first met the German commander, Gen. Erich von Elster at a little bridge near Chateauroux, about 150 miles away from the 83d Division CP. Von Elster, outflanked by the Third Army, was fleeing toward Belfort, but he was afraid he couldn't make it. Sam talked the situation over with the German general, and when both came to the conclusion that the wisest course would be for the 20,000 Germans to give up to the 36 Yanks, the lieutenant got communications through to Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon, the 83d's CG. It took a lot of talking to make some of the high brass in intelligence believe that such a thing could be, Sam said. A skeptical colonel who had hurried to the scene of the reported surrender got there in time to see Gen. Macon, Gen. Elster and Sam sitting at a table. All the colonel could say was: “I'll be damned! There was something to it.”

The morale of his international platoon would

chateau itself had glass fences and marble staircases with velvet carpets.”

The platoon ended the war in style. There was a bit of a breather while they helped the lieutenant distribute 22 million gallons of captured German liquor. After that Sam was military governor of the town of Wolfenbuttel for awhile.

Then the platoon took off for the Elbe, and in a few days cleaned up 18 towns on its own, took 485 PWs and freed two political camps.

The first Russian they saw was a girl marching as guide at the head of a column, but instead of giving them the French kiss-on-both-cheeks treatment, she ran over and quickly picked some flowers from the roadside for them.

A little later Sam and some of his men found an emaciated American PW. He asked them to go for his buddies who had been hiding in the woods for days. It was another one of those fluid situations; they didn't know where the Germans were, and when 50 saber-waving, screaming horsemen came charging out of the woods they decided that they had finally had it.

But the horsemen turned out to be Cossacks; with mustaches, and nothing would do for them but to kiss Sam and his men. Then they rode into the woods and got the other PWs. One prisoner that was carried out cried when he saw Sam. He said, “Sir, do you mind if I kiss you?”

“The poor guy had a beard an inch long,” said Sam, “and he was as dirty as you'd be if you had been lying in a hole for weeks. But I said, ‘Sure, soldier. Go ahead!’”

The two girls at the bar who had been talking about the shoes decided that Sam wasn't interested, and they swished out to take a walk. Sam said it was about chow time and he had to see the boys who had come in with him. He said they were going over to see if the Louvre had Venus uncured yet.

Most of his old men are gone now, he reflected. Some were casualties, others have gone home or have been transferred. He himself is learning to be an I & E officer, and when he goes back to his station in Bavaria he has a GI chicken farm and a machine shop to supervise. It is a quiet life, but a safe one.

Sam stands high on points, but when he gets back to the States he isn't sure what he is going to do. Berner, his platoon sergeant, says he can get Sam a job with him as a railroad cop.

“It wouldn't be a bad job,” said Sam, “except that it would take me away from my wife and that kid I haven't seen. But I'll go to work some place. That ‘hero of Ohio’ stuff doesn't carry any pension with it.”