

# PANNEBAKKER FAMILY NEWS



NEWSLETTER OF THE PANNEBAKKER FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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## Dutch Family Tends Grave of U.S. Soldier

**Gary A. Warner**

Jonas Daemen woke Sunday in the Dutch village of Heerlen, loaded some flowers into the family car and made the half-hour drive to a green swath on the edge of the village of Margraten. At the Netherlands American Cemetery, he walked into the 65 acres of green lawns where 8,301 nearly identical headstones march into the distance. The regiments of graves can be confusing to navigate, but Jonas knew his way. He is the fourth generation of his family to come to Margraten this time of year, and the destination is always the same: Plot K, Row 3, Grave 6. The white marble cross is chiseled with the name of a man his family has known for 72 years:

EMMETT C. DE LANEY  
 T. Sgt 736 Tk Bn  
 Oregon April 19 1945

Jonas is the newest guardian of this one small plot of hallowed ground holding the remains of a Bend, Oregon box factory worker who went off to war and never came back. Since 1945, De Laney's grave has been watched over by four generations of Jonas' family. Several times a year, they visit the grave, plant flowers and report any damage or dirt to cemetery officials. The most important day is the Memorial Day commemoration each May. Now, Jonas will be the guardian of the grave of a man killed more than a half-century before Jonas was born. "I want to honor a soldier who liberated our country and proceed with the tradition started by my great-grandfather," Jonas said.

The same promise has been made to each of the 8,301 soldiers at Margraten. The graves were adopted after World War II, with many being handed down within families with each generation. For decades, Jonas' family knew little about Emmett De Laney beyond what appeared on the gravestone: Name, rank, unit, home state and date of death. Last month, they saw a picture of De Laney for the first time. A thin young man with carefully combed hair, in jacket and tie, with a shy but friendly smile. If he were alive, De Laney would be 94 — perhaps a gray and grizzled great-grandfather with a flock of nieces, nephews and relatives of every rank. Instead, he is forever 22.

Like millions of Americans, Ted Parker, of La Pine, became interested in genealogy as he reached middle age. Parker signed up for Ancestry.com and was soon climbing through the branches of his family tree. His mother grew up in South Dakota and would recall her favorite cousin was a boy named Emmett. When his mother's family fled the Depression and moved to Bend, Emmett followed and lived with them for a while. Eventually, Emmett's parents and two older sisters came to Deschutes County. As Parker filled out his online family tree, he uploaded a picture of Emmett De Laney onto the site with a notation that he had been killed in World War II.

On Oct. 6 of last year, an email arrived from a stranger. Astrid van Erp introduced herself as a researcher for a Dutch nonprofit group whose name translates to Foundation United Adopters American War Graves. Its mission is to "give a face" to the more than 24,000 American soldiers killed in World War II buried in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Luxembourg. They frequently find fresh leads on genealogy websites as old photos and documents long tucked away in family closets and attics are being scanned and uploaded.

Parker's photo of Emmett De Laney caught her eye. The name matched one of a man buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten. But the group had no photo of the soldier. Van Erp emailed Parker to ask if he could send her the photo to add to the foundation's website, fieldsofhonor-database.com. In exchange, she would send him a photo of De Laney's gravesite in Margraten. Parker agreed.

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Six months later, Astrid van Erp appeared in Parker's email inbox again. Did Parker know a Dutch family had "adopted" De Laney's grave at the end of World War II and tended it since?

The family of Cecile van de Grint was now the caretaker. "Would you be interested in corresponding with them?" van Erp asked. "Very interested," Parker messaged back.

On May 8, coincidentally the date of the Nazi surrender in 1945, an email arrived from Cecile van de Grint.

"We are taking care of the grave for 3 generations now," she wrote in English. "My grandfather adopted the grave in '45, and my mother inherited the grave from him." She had some news — the fourth generation of her family was taking over on Memorial Day. For grave adopters, it is the most important date of the year when thousands of people come to Margraten to honor the war dead. "We turned it over to my son, Jonas, this year," she wrote. It wasn't just a teenager's "I promise, Mom" pledge. Jonas had signed the "adoption papers" required by the Dutch group that decides who can be the guardian of the grave. To prepare, Jonas took a trip to the D-Day beaches and museums in France. "It is promised to be a memorable journey for 16 year olds," van de Grint said. With the newly learned historical background, Jonas would be fully in charge this Memorial Day at Margraten. "We will make a picture of him and the memorial cross and send it to you," his mother wrote. She just had one question of her own about Emmett.

"What can you tell us about his too short life?"

Emmett Christopher De Laney was born in 1922 in North Dakota, but by age 8 was living in Rosholt, South Dakota, a farm and railroad town of 300 people at the bottom end of the Red River Valley, where the state meets North Dakota and Minnesota. His father, Chris, was a cream buyer, a middleman between farmers and dairies. De Laney graduated from high school in the late spring of 1940, about the time the Nazi blitzkrieg over-ran neutral Netherlands on the way to Paris. Over 2,200 Dutch troops died in five days of fighting. When America entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the nation threw off the Great Depression as the war economy went into overdrive. In Oregon, the timber industry had the sawmills going 24 hours, transforming trees into military barracks and ammo boxes. The Navy ordered 5.4 million board-feet of Oregon Douglas fir lumber just to build a pair of massive hangers in Southern California for submarine-hunting blimps. De Laney heard from relatives that there were more good jobs than workers in Bend. He came west and was quickly hired at the Shevlin-Hixon box factory turning out packing crates for the war effort. Eventually, the whole family was in Deschutes County. At the end of 1942, De Laney's family was living at 713 Federal St. The phone book listed father and son as "millworker" at Shevlin-Hixon. The Army needed boxes, but it needed soldiers even more. In January 1943, De Laney was inducted into the Army assigned to tank training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. It wasn't until the end of 1944 that he received orders to go to war. On his last leave in Bend, he showed off his uniform with three stripes and letter "T" of a technical sergeant.

De Laney served with the 736th Tank Battalion, part of the 8th Armored Division, nicknamed "The Thundering Herd" for its reputation of attacking in mass numbers. He took part in the last big offensive to push the Nazis out of the Netherlands, where the Germans had cut off food supplies to 4.5 million civilians. More than 16,000 died of starvation during "The Hunger Winter," as it is known. Then came "Operation Grenade," the northern spearhead into Germany itself. By mid-April 1945, De Laney's unit was near the medieval city of Halberstadt. The Nazi mayor refused the American demand to surrender the city. Instead of sending troops in, commanders ordered B-17s to drop 600 tons of bombs, reducing it to rubble.

During the pause, soldiers talked about the concentration camp they had liberated, with just 5,000 emaciated prisoners left alive. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had died of a stroke, but with the Red Army capturing Vienna on the way to Berlin and Americans slamming their way to the Rhine, victory in Europe was no longer "if" but "when." Orders came for De Laney and his men to take a resupply column to troops closer to the front lines, according to Army reports. Just another bit of depot duty.

Soon after starting their route east, a rocket from a German Panzerschreck bazooka slammed into one of the vehicles as the whole column was raked with machine gun fire. In the confusion of the bombing and rapid American offensive, some German units had been overlooked or hid to strike later. De Laney was hit by a sniper rifle round. Bleeding profusely, he struggled out of his destroyed vehicle. He ordered three men near him to take cover, while he remained exposed to enemy fire. Many of the column's drivers had been killed, blocking any attempt by survivors to move forward or back.

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Staying where they were meant certain death. De Laney ordered his men to scramble to the last vehicle in the column and see if they could start it. He would stay and shoot at any Germans who tried to chase them down. The truck motor roared to life and De Laney staggered back, the men pulling him in before speeding to safety. De Laney lay in a field hospital for five days before dying of his wounds on April 19, 1945. He was awarded the Silver Star — for by “his gallantry and courageous action, the lives of three of his men were saved.”

On April 30, Americans did not yet know Adolf Hitler had committed suicide in Berlin earlier that day. In Bend, a Western Union courier arrived at the small house with a stone fireplace at 1015 Hartford Ave. with a telegram for Mr. Christopher De Laney. “The Secretary of War desires me to express his deepest regret ...” it began. Chris and Annie didn’t have to read further to know their only son was dead. The local newspaper carried a story May 1, headlined “Sgt. De Laney, 22, Is War Victim.” It announced that a requiem high Mass would be celebrated at St. Francis Catholic Church on Thursday, two days later. The weekend after the Mass, Germany surrendered.

Back in Europe, De Laney’s body was taken by Graves Registration units to Margraten, a collection point for Americans killed across a wide swath of Northern Europe. All through 1945 and into 1946, they arrived — more than 17,000 in all. Nearly 10,000 war dead were “disinterred” and “repatriated” across the Atlantic to be reburied in family plots, church graveyards or national cemeteries closer to home.

De Laney was among the 8,301 who remained. Some had no relatives to claim them. Some families didn’t want the pain of a body coming home. Others believed their soldiers would have wanted to stay beside the men who had fought and died together.

Villagers watched the American soldiers endlessly digging graves. Some grabbed their shovels and picks to join in the sad chore. Women from Margraten planted flowers in the brown field, with so much dirt turned over that it looked like a desert.

The villagers started a list of the names on the makeshift grave markers. Families volunteered to adopt graves to ensure they were maintained in the future. A few chose soldiers they had met while they were bivouacked nearby, who shared meals and helped with chores, only to march into Germany and come back in a pine box. But most just took the next name on the list. When Pierre Kolenburg stepped up, he was given Emmett De Laney. At first, all that was known to a volunteer was what was etched on headstones. For a period after the war, the Pentagon would not give the Dutch information about their adopted soldiers. Officials were afraid a letter from a stranger in a graveyard would reopen still-fresh wounds — or, worse, the impoverished Dutch would ask for money or gifts for seeing over a grave.

As Europe recovered, the authorities relented. In 1960, the Pentagon turned over the Netherlands American Cemetery to the American Battlefield Monuments Commission. Official reports, newspaper and magazine stories, pictures, and stories circulated. Some reached out to families back in the United States to let the Americans know their sons’ final resting place was in good hands. Veterans groups as well as genealogy and military websites accelerated the communications in recent years. For many, the virtual communication was enough. But a growing number of soldier’s families, unaware of the tenderness and affection afforded their long-departed loved ones, wanted to meet face-to-face.

Margraten became a place of pilgrimage for relatives and descendants, many too young or not even born during the war, who like the Dutch knew the soldiers only by what they had left behind. In Margraten, visitors found people who were like long-lost brothers or uncles, close friends and — in a real sense — neighbors of the dead.

Many families have handed down the responsibilities of “their soldier” from generation to generation. Jonas Daemen honored Sgt. Emmett C. DeLaney in 2017, just as his great-grandfather had in 1945. “We wish Emmett’s parents and family would have known — they would have been very grateful, as we are,” said Ted Parker. Others buried at Margraten have had their caretakers pass away. It has been 72 years since World War II ended, time enough for memories to fade and promises to be forgotten. Not in Margraten. Today, there is a waiting list with 300 names of those waiting to adopt a soldier.

## Dues Reminder

Your annual dues are important to our family association. If you've not sent your dues yet, please do so. Your \$10 annual dues can be paid by mailing a check to: Marcea P. Kligman 4170 Summit Way Marietta, GA 30066-234

## Embroidment with the Indians-1728

In the year 1728 occurred a difficulty with the Indians, the only interruption during the early days of the settlement of those pleasing and friendly relations which ever existed between the Pennsylvanians and the natives, and, for that reason, conspicuous and to be treated more seriously than circumstances would otherwise require. Eleven Indians, all armed and under the command of a Spanish Indian, appeared in the neighborhood of Colebrookdale, and rudely forced their way into the houses, and compelled the people to supply them with meat and drink.

A dispatch was prepared and sent to the Governor:

“To his Excellency Patrick Gordon Esqr. Governor General in Chief over the Province of pencilvania and the Territories thereunto Belonging. Van Bebbers Township and the adjacencies Belonging May ye 10, 1728”

The Petition very carefully explained the fear residents felt regarding additional attacks from Indians in the area.

“Therefore, we the humble Petitioners hereof, Do Desire an answer from you Excellency by ye Bearer with speed”. Nineteen names appear on the petition including that of Henry Pannebecker.

Many of the inhabitants had left their homes and taken shelter at a mill near New Hanover in order to defend themselves. The Governor ordered powder and lead be distributed and the actions were completed by Marcus Ruling and Mordecai Lincoln; ancestor of President Lincoln.

Acting upon the impulse, about a month later, two brothers, John and William Winter, killed Toka Collie and two Indian women, and brought two Indian girls, one who was maimed to Justice George Boone, Ancestor of Daniel Boone, demanding a reward. The Governor therefore immediately sent a messenger with some presents to the Indian girls who had been injured with instructions to employ some skilled person to dress their wounds, and, to assure that their assailants should not be permitted to escape punishment. He also sent John and Nicholas Scull, interpreters, to the chiefs, Allummapees, Opekasset, Manawkyhickon, to inform them that measures had been taken to arrest the Winters and to request them to meet him in council at Conestoga, on 22nd of May. Accompanied by about thirty of the principle men of the colony, bringing blankets, food and rum. He found there awaiting him seventeen chiefs, representing the Delawares, Ganawese, Shawanese and Mingoos.

The Governor promised that the perpetrators of the outrage upon the Indians should be treated as they deserved. The Winter brothers were afterward tried for murder, convicted and hanged, and in this way terminated the embroilment.

Have a wonderful summer.  
Ron Pennypacker

## Officers

**President:** Ron Pennypacker  
520 Loch Alsh Ave.  
Ambler, PA 19002  
(484) 302-6842  
[r.pennypacker@yahoo.com](mailto:r.pennypacker@yahoo.com)

**Vice President:** Linda Millerick  
751 Monterey Salinas Hwy.  
Salinas, CA 93908-8953  
(831) 484-2834  
[lmcnealmillerick@yahoo.com](mailto:lmcnealmillerick@yahoo.com)

**Secretary:** Marcea P. Kligman  
4170 Summit Way  
Marietta, GA 30066-2346  
(770) 928-9055  
[mpklig@bellsouth.net](mailto:mpklig@bellsouth.net)

**Treasurer:** Bill McNeary  
601 East Cypress Street  
Charleston, MO 63834  
(573) 683-1998  
[bmcneary@ldd.net](mailto:bmcneary@ldd.net)

**Membership:** Sandie Miller  
255 Shoreline Drive  
Columbia, SC 29212-8024  
(803) 749-0206  
[smil1025@sc.rr.com](mailto:smil1025@sc.rr.com)

## Newsletter/WebMaster:

Bruce Pennypacker  
201 Shady Brook Drive  
Langhorne, PA 19047  
(215) 380-1748  
[throwcoach@gmail.com](mailto:throwcoach@gmail.com)

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# *Pannebakker Family Association*



The Pannebakker Family Association is an outgrowth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699. In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pfannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."