

How We did it!

Finding Sgt. Richard E. Owen's Family

compiled by Mary McCampbell Bell, CG¹

Introduction

This is the remarkable story of how an intrepid group of researchers, both civilian and military, along with two reporters, were able to locate the missing family members of Sgt. Richard E. Owen, a long-dead member of the famed Easy Company of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne better known as the “Band of Brothers,” immortalized by the HBO mini-series of that name.



Figure 1
Sgt. Richard E. Owen



Figure 2 Purple Heart Citation

They were obsessed with finding the family in order to re-unite a framed photo of the downed WWII paratrooper and his framed purple heart citation with the actual Purple Heart medal that had been cherished through the years by members of Sgt. Owen's widow's family.

This article traces how the research was conducted which led to the exciting conclusion. When available, the various posters on the military blogs are listed by name, otherwise they are known simply by their screen name.²

The story began in January, 2010, in the Salvation Army thrift store in Massena, New York. Sheila Gladding was sorting through a box of donations. She found a framed

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²See the list of researchers and a few of their contributions at the end of this article.

photograph of Sgt. Richard E. Owen in his dress uniform [fig.1]³ along with a framed citation for his Purple Heart awarded after his C-47, known as plane 66, was shot down by German anti-aircraft fire on D-Day, 6 June 1944, over the beaches of Normandy, France [fig. 2]. Robin McMahon, the Salvation Army store employee who worked tirelessly to find a member of the family, credits one of their volunteers, Randy, as the person who recognized just what the purple heart citation meant, and his friend, Rusty Charitier, as the person with the computer skills to begin the online search.



Figure 3 Capt. Ron Heimbrock and staff member, Darlene Pelkey.

Believing some member of the family disposed of these items by mistake, Salvation Army Captain Ron Heimbrock [fig. 3] and the store's staff, especially Robin McMahon, did their best to locate the person who had dropped off the box, but to no avail.⁴

The Salvation Army then decided that they wanted to track down a member of his family to give the items, and if they were unsuccessful, then they wanted them to be given to an appropriate institution or museum. The local television station did a story on it, and also the local newspapers,⁵ but no one came forward to claim the items.

However, once the story was picked up by the Associated Press, people all over the country began to independently research Sgt. Owen in hopes of helping the Salvation Army find his family. There were a number of researchers working simultaneously: Harold Keisling of Cookeville, TN, a Vietnam veteran and member of the 101st Airborne, and his cousin, Cleston Connor of Carmi IL, worked together tracing their

³On the picture frame a name, "Hilda Hume," was written, but she has not been identified. On the back of the frame was an envelope with a \$.15 cent stamp and the address of Mrs. Ruth Owen, Winchester, Virginia. This may be a copy of the photograph mentioned in his brother, Rev. George E. Owen's biographical memoir when he said, on page 23, "Dick had sent us a photograph in uniform from England and had written of the hazards ahead."

⁴Robin McMahon began posting 22 Feb on the Burn Pit Blog and on *This Ain't Hell* blog owned by Jonn Lilylea on 24 Feb.

⁵Bob Beckstead, "Search For Purple Heart Soldier's Family Expands," <http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20100219/DCO01/302199894/-1/dco01> Daily Courier Observer serves Potsdam and Messana.

family genealogy, and they began researching on this one. When the trail led back to Frederick County, Virginia, Harold contacted Ellen Murphy, Frederick County Commissioner of the Revenue. Mrs. Murphy put them in contact with Adrian O'Connor, the Editorial Page Editor of *The Winchester Star*, who later wrote about the search in his column, *The Valley Pike*.

Craig Monaco of Watertown, New York, also worked independently and sent his findings to Capt. Ron Heimbrock. Then there was Mark Seavey of Indianapolis, Indiana, who became totally obsessed by the story and is credited with marshaling veterans, military bloggers, and civilian posters to join the search by posting threads on several milblogs. Mark writes for the American Legion's blog, [The Burn Pit](#), and he also had a thread about Owen on Jonn Ilyea's blog, [This Ain't Hell But You Can See It From Here](#). Almost every hour something new and exciting was being posted. In addition, Cynthia Burton of *The Winchester Star* and Brigid Schulte of *The Washington Post* were independently developing stories on Sgt. Owen.

The collaboration between all the posters on *This Ain't Hell* was exhilarating. So many people were seriously searching for evidence about the Owen family in so many directions that Mark finally, on February 25th, requested that we all use the [Burn Pit blog](#) so he could keep track of the research. In order to aid Mark and the others, on February 23rd I constructed a time line with what information we had at that point. That allowed everyone to see what information we had, what we still needed, and allowed us find errors in the research.⁶

The problem with so many people doing research in so many directions was that there were comments on various blogs that were missed. The first post by Mark was started on the [Burn Pit](#) on February 18th, and many military veterans joined the search to find members of the Easy Company who might have known Sgt. Owen and could shed light on where he was from, etc. While they were able to track down surviving members of Easy Company, no one remembered the Sergeant. There were several wonderful web sites devoted to the Band of Brothers.⁷ These gave us extremely valuable information on the history of the company.

⁶See Appendix G for the time line.

⁷Mark Bando's website, "Band of Brothers- Company E/506th P.I.R. in WW2," <http://www.101airborneww2.com/bandofbrothers.html> tells the history of the unit and what happened to them after Normandy. Also, The 506th Infantry Regiment.org website. On the left-hand navigation bar, click on "other links of interest." <http://www.506infantry.org/index.htm>. Another site of interest was the history of the 29th Division which tells of the formation and disbandment of the 29th Division Ranger Bn. "History of the 29th Division," <http://www.29thdivision.com/history/index.html>.

Sgt. Owen's Service

By the time I became involved with this saga on February 20th, much had already been done to establish the service of Sgt. Owen. Several people had found his enlistment records online at the National Archives Website and on Ancestry.com.⁸

Army serial number	20365291
Name	Richard E. Owen
Residence	Frederick County, Virginia
Place of enlistment	Winchester
Year	1941
Grade	PVT
Branch	Infantry
Component of Army	National Guard
Nativity	Indiana
Year of birth	1913
Education	2 years college
Civilian occupation	Post Office
Marital status	single, with dependents

Mark posted parts of his service record on the *Burn Pit* on February 25th 2010. This service record was submitted by Richard's widow, Ruth McCann Owen, to the Virginia WWII History Commission located within the University of Virginia's library, Charlottesville, Virginia. It later became part of the archives at the Library of Virginia.⁹

"Went to England with the 29th Division in Oct. of 1942. Transferred to 29th Div. Ranger Bn. In spring of 43. While training in Scotland his leg was broken. After several months he was back with the 29th, and ["then", handwritten] transferred to COMPANY E, 506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. ["Paratroops", handwritten.] He

⁸National Archives, "World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946," database on-line, *Ancestry.com*,

⁹ "Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. World War II History Commission. Personal War Service Records of Virginia's War Dead, 1941-1946. Accession 24805," Mark Seavey received this service record on February 19th from Dave Berry of Pathfinder Consultants. Dave had received it from an acquaintance, Wes Burritt of Dover, DE, who had gotten it from his brother-in-law who works at the Library of Virginia.

was serving with the paratroops when they left for France about midnight of June 5, 1944. Their ["Their" typed over that as well] plane [sic] was last seen shortly after 1 A.M. June 6th 1944. When found [sic, "found"] later, apparently [sic, "apparently"] it has [sic] been shot down while flying very low.

According to Ruth McCann Owen's submission to the World War II History Commission, Richard was in training at Ft. George Meade, MD, A. P. Hill Reservation,¹⁰ and finally at Camp Blanding in Florida. He was promoted to Sgt. in March of 1942, and left for England with the 29th Division in October 1942.¹¹ The troops were taken to Camp Kilmer, NJ, for deployment overseas. After landing in Scotland, they were taken to Tidworth Barracks, Wiltshire, in Southern England.¹² In the spring of 1943, he transferred to the 29th Division, Ranger Battalion, and broke his leg while in training circa March 1943 in Scotland.¹³ That summer, Richard transferred to Co. E, 506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. On the 5th of June, 1944, Easy Company moved to Uppottery Field, the marshalling area for Operation Overlord as they prepared for D-Day, the invasion of Normandy, France.¹⁴

He was supposed to be part of the paratroopers who landed in Normandy on 6 June, but he never made it. His plane took off about midnight on the 5th of June and they were last heard from about 1 a.m. on June 6th, 1944. Dick along with 16 fellow paratroopers and the crew of four died when their plane was hit by enemy fire and crashed into a hedgerow near the village of Beuzeville, Normandy, on D-Day on 6 June

¹⁰This later became Camp A. P. Hill, and is now Ft. A. P. Hill. It is located outside Fredericksburg, Virginia.

¹¹"Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. World War II History Commission. Personal War Service Records of Virginia's War Dead, 1941-1946. Accession 24805," Ruth McCann Owen submitted the information found in this document.

¹²History of the 29th Division, <http://www.29thdivision.com/history/index.html>. "While at Tidworth the European Theater of Operations created a provisional unit within the 29th Division, the 29th Ranger Battalion. The Army's lone ranger battalion recently demonstrated its worth in North Africa and planners in London wanted a similar elite group in England to prepare for the invasion of Europe. The picked men learned specialized assault tactics by training with British Commandos and detachments accompanied their instructors on three hit-and-run raids in Norway and in the English Channel. The 29th Rangers also performed well in allied pre-invasion exercises in England. A policy decision by the War Department awarded the ranger mission to others, forcing London to disband the battalion in October 1943. Fortunately for the Blue and Gray, the men returned to their former units and passed on their skills."

¹³"Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. World War II History Commission. Personal War Service Records of Virginia's War Dead, 1941-1946. Accession 24805,"

¹⁴<http://www.easy506th.org/history.php>

1944.¹⁵ There is a remarkable writeup about the crash of Sgt. Owen's C-47 found in the Forced Landing Association newsletter, and is included here with permission of Mr. Guy Lepretre of Belgium, the author.¹⁶

"On June 5, 1944, 1st LT Thomas Meehan, III boarded a C-47 to be parachuted in Normandy. Lieutenant Meehan had just been appointed Commander of the "E" Company of the 506th PIR. He was in plane 66, along with the company's staff made up of 16 paratroopers. Lt. Harold Cappelluto was flying the aircraft and leading the formation, followed by Lt. Frank Deflita's plane."

"Deflita remembers: "As we flew over Normandy, DCA's started shooting at us, and Harold's plane got it several times. I could see Flak shrapnel[sic] going straight through his plane. After maintaining its course and speed for a while, the plane left the formation and slowly initiated a right turn. I followed it with my eyes and noticed its landing lights coming on, I thought it was going to be all right. Then, suddenly, it came crashing down a hedgerow and instantly exploded."



Figure 4 Wreckage of Plane 66. Photo by F. Guth via D-Day Publishing

¹⁵ "Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. World War II History Commission. Personal War Service Records of Virginia's War Dead, 1941-1946. Accession 24805,"; "Plane Crash Information," database, (<http://www.planecrashinfo.com/1944/1944-14.htm>; accessed 5 March 2010), Description of Richard Owen's plane crash over Normandy. Richard, with 17 fellow members of Easy Co. along with four crew of plane #42-93095 crashed over Beauzeville, France, on D-Day; Owen, "Autobiographical Sketch of the Life of George Earle Owen," p.23. "During the war Dick joined the army, became a ranger and was killed on the first day of the Normandy Invasion. The report reached us in Argentina. Dick had sent us a photograph in uniform from England and had written of the hazards ahead."

¹⁶ Guy Lepretre, "E" Company, 506th PIR, 101st Airborne Division, Normandy, June 6, 1944, Forced Landing Association Newsletter, April.2000, published on the web site of The 506th Infantry.org. <http://www.506infantry.org/his2ndbnwwiimemo01.html>

"Henry Margerie, Mayor of Beuzeville au Plain, witnessed the accident. He also remembers: 'As we awakened to Flak shooting and planes flying over the area, I saw a plane close to the village which seemed to be trouble and attempted to land. I lost sight of it for a brief moment and then heard a loud explosion. The plane had crashed on a hedgerow bordering a field near the village. It burnt for three days, and the heat created by the fire made it impossible for us to approach [fig. 4].'"

"47 years later, my friend Jean Pierre from the Forced Landing Association and I met Mr. Marjorie during one of our investigating trips. Mr. Marjorie gave us an account of the June 6 forced landing and showed us precisely where it took place."

"After consulting the American archive "Missing Air Crew Report," we figured that these would be the remains of plane 66 which transported the "E" Company Commander and staff. While searching the site, we came to the conclusion we

dreaded. As we dug the parachutes hooks out of the ashes, we noticed they were still locked. None of the occupants of the plane had managed to escape from the crash and jump. From the ashes that were piled on the hedge up to 80 cm, we pulled out dog tags, crickets, rings and a watch. The hands of the watch had stopped at 01:12, this only reinforced what we knew about the force of the impact. Among the debris, we also found a helmet which had been completely flattened. The scene had such an emotional power on us that we decided with Mr. Margerie to erect a stele (monument) in memory of the courageous crew whose destiny had been to die before the battle had even begun [fig. 5]."

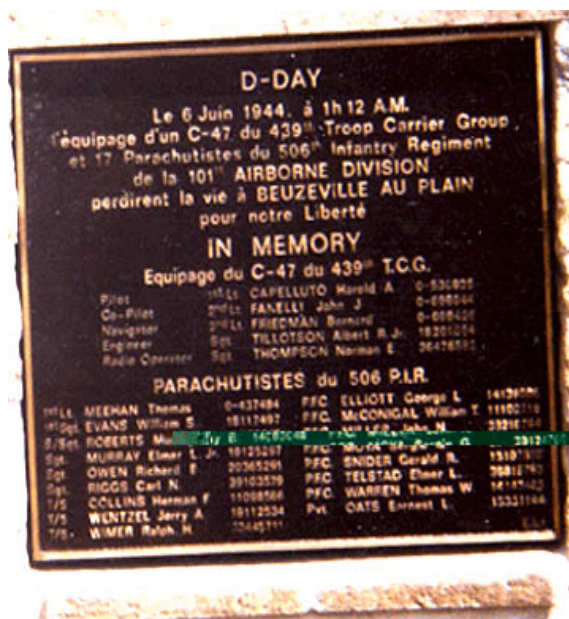


Figure 5 Photo taken in June 2000, showing the plaque on the Beuzeville monument which lists the victims of the C-47 crash. This is on the road about 5 minutes east of St Mere Eglise, near the Beuzeville church.

<http://www.101airborneww2.com/bandofbrothers.html>

Major Dick Winters, then a 1st Lt., became the Commanding Officer of Easy Company after the death of Lt. Thomas Meehan who was on Plane 66. The Major Dick Winters.com website is devoted to the Easy Company and other WWII resources. Their forum moderator posted a thread about Richard Owen, and one of the members, screen name krex725, found a very interesting sidelight to the Richard Owen story when he watched the Band of Brothers DVD. He posted this message on March

16th 2010.

"At the end of the Episode 3: Carentan, when Sgt. Malarkey returns to the English laundry to retrieve his clothing, the woman asks him if he could also take Lt. Meehan's. After paying for Lt. Meehan's laundry, she then asks for additional help and begins reading off more names. Shortly before reading off Blithe, she says "Owen". The camera pans past a package with "Owen R E, Sgt 203652 [sic]" written across it."¹⁷

Searching for the Family

With Sgt. Owen's service established, it was time to start the search for family members. We knew, from Ruth McCann Owen's submission to the History Commission that Richard was born in Sandborn, IN, on 13 August 1913. Mark's first posting on *This Ain't Hell* was on 19 February when he related that he was working with someone from Pathfinders Historical Consultants [Dave Berry], and reported finding Ruth McCann Milhollen's obituary. She died in Winchester in 2002. After Richard's death she remarried to William Kyle Milhollen who died in 1980. It named several nieces and great-nieces as her survivors, but after futile efforts to track them down, Mark decided to concentrate on finding a member of the Owen family.

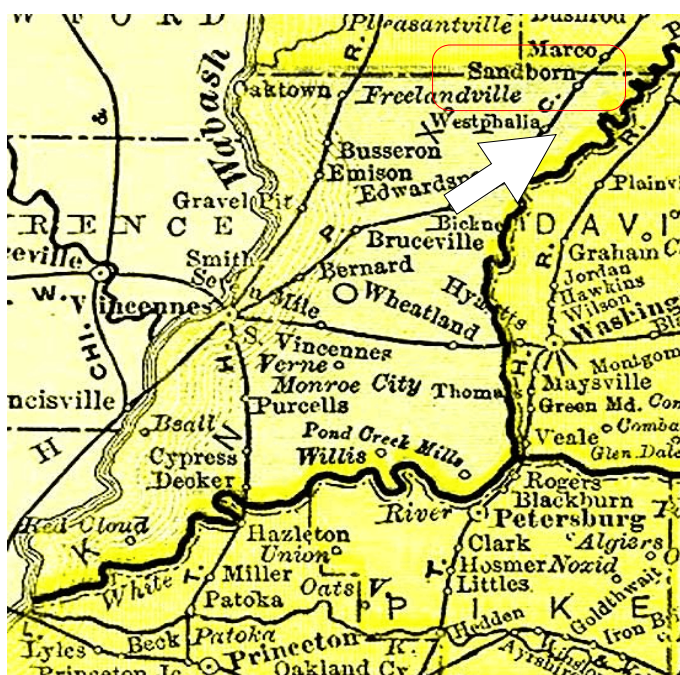


Figure 6 Map of Knox and Daviess Counties, IN.

In hopes that he could find out more about the family, on February 22nd, he took a road trip to Sandborn, Indiana [see fig. 6]. At the same time, a military blogger friend, Deb Leonard of the *YankeeMom* blog, went to the Winchester courthouse, and found the marriage record of Richard E. Owen to Ruth Virginia McCann.

¹⁷Krex725 (name not known), "HELP NEEDED TRACING A VET'S FAMILY (Richard Owen's story)," unknown creator, *MajorDickWinters.com*, 14 March 2010 (<http://www.majordickwinters.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=3619>; accessed 23 May 2010).

They were married on 13 September, 1941. The marriage record gave his parents as Rev. George E. Owen and Nora Bell and that he was born in Sandborn, Indiana, and his occupation was “soldier.” There was no doubt now that we had the right soldier.

While in Sandborn, Mark found the Sandborn Christian Church where Richard’s father was the minister in 1911. He also obtained copies of the birth certificates of Richard, born Noelle Earnest Owen, on 18 August 1913 [fig. 7], and his brother Paul Parsons Owen in Knox County.

Meanwhile, everyone who had access to Ancestry.com was searching the Federal population census for Richard’s parents. According to the Indiana Marriage Collection on Ancestry, they had been married on 29 July 1909 in Daviess County which adjoined Knox County [see fig. 6].

There was no problem finding the couple in the 1910 census of Knox County, Indiana. They were living in

Sandborn, Vigo Township. George and wife Nora were listed as married one year, and his occupation was “minister.” They had a 2-yr-old son George E. who was born in Virginia, as was his mother. For clarity, since young George also grew up to be a minister of the Disciples of Christ or Christian Church, he will be known as George [Jr] and his father as George [Sr]. This census raised many questions. Had George been married previously? Nora could not be the child’s mother. Where had he resided in Virginia? Was he in Frederick County?

Henry Lee, a researcher on the *Burn Pit* blog, found George E. Owen [Sr’s] registration record for the World War I draft on Ancestry.com. In 1918, he was shown to be a minister living in Vincennes, Knox County, Indiana, married [wife’s name was Nora] with two children. It also gave his full date of birth, 5 August 1879 [fig. 8].



Figure 7 Birth Certificate of Richard E. Owen

Figure 8 World War I Draft Registration from Ancestry.com

By 1920 they were in Lovington Township, village of Lovington, Moultrie Co., Illinois. George E. [Sr] was 39 occupation: minister in church, Nora was 29, son Earl 11 [George Jr] b. Virginia, and the rest of the children were born in Indiana, daughter Dimple 9, son Earnest 6 [Richard E.], and son Paul age 11 mos.

The same day, Adrian O'Connor, the Editorial Page Editor of the *Winchester Star* and author of a column, "The Valley Pike," wrote about the Owen story and how it had fired the imaginations of so many people across the country [see appendix C].

On February 26th, Henry Lee posted on *The Burn Pit* that Nora Bell Owen died 6 September 1935, and was buried in the Antioch Christian Church Cemetery in Daviess County, Indiana. His source was the Hamer Robinson McMullen Families on Rootsweb, part of Ancestry.com. There was no death date for her husband, Rev. George E. Owen [Sr.] and no mention of children. We found this puzzling. The death date came from a



Figure 9 *New Castle News*, 5 August 1924

book on Daviess County cemeteries.

Finally, on March 6th, Brigid Schulte of *The Washington Post* published an article that she had been working on which really helped to fill in some of the gaps in the story [see Appendix E]. Both of these reporters had been working on their stories for several days, and I had the pleasure of speaking on the phone with each of them as did Mark Seavey.

I shared with Brigid the marvelous finds from the *New Castle News* from New Castle, Pennsylvania, that Robin McMahon had alerted me to since I had a subscription to Ancestry.com. This was one of those “chatty” small town papers that published everything on their social page. The entries for the family were most informative.

We learned that Rev. George E. [Sr.] was the pastor of the Central Christian Church, that his wife, Nora, was also an ordained minister in the Christian Church, and the children were all very active in church and school activities.

There were articles announcing when the family arrived in New Castle in 1924 [figure 9] and when they left in June of 1926 [figure 10].

The Mystery of Richard Owen’s dependents in 1941

In Richard Owen’s enlistment record, it said he was single, with dependents. Who were these dependents? Several ideas had been floated and rejected by the posters on *This Ain’t Hell*. Were the dependents actually his parents? Were they children by an unknown marriage? It was a mystery and we wondered if it would ever be solved.

When Cynthia Burton was researching her 24th February article for *The Winchester Star*, she had heard about an orphan, Paul Glass, who lived with Richard, but no one

Unemployment remained widespread at 784,000 on May 1, through registering a 5 per cent decline in two weeks prior thereto.

Rev. George Owen And Family Leave For Washington, Ind.

Rev. and Mrs. George E. Owen and family of South Mill street left Monday for Washington, Ind., where they expect to spend the summer.

Rev. Owen closed his pastorate with the Central Christian church of this city on June 13. He has not made any definite plans concerning his future work.

Awarded Prize In

Figure 10 *New Castle News*, 22 June 1926

knew what relationship was or what had happened to him except that they thought he had moved to Washington, D.C. We all knew we had to find this Paul Glass, and determine if he could lead us to living family members.

As early as February 26th, I had felt that Paul must be the son of Dimple, the only daughter of Rev. George [Sr.] and wife Nora, who must have married an unknown Glass. Knowing that he was an orphan in 1941, it was too early for Dimple to be listed in the Social Security Death Index; however, on a whim, I checked the index on Ancestry.com and was surprised to find the following: "Dimple Glass b. 18 September 1910 d. February 1981. Last residence: Washington, Daviess Co., IN."

This couldn't just be a coincidence. This was the county in which George [Sr.] and Nora Bell had been married, but why was Dimple living there? If her son was an orphan in 1941, how could his mother be living until 1981? What had happened to this family? Who was his father? The mystery deepened.

No one had been able to find the family of Rev. George Owen [Sr] in the 1930 census, but on March 2nd, Henry Lee had a major, major find when he found them listed as "Orren" instead of "Owen." They were living in Enid, Oklahoma, in the household of their daughter Dimple who had married another minister of the Christian Church, Russell Glass. Here was our unknown Glass bridegroom. Too bad we had not known the fact that Richard E. Owen had served in the National Guard in Enid. We might have found the family sooner!

While all our efforts were being reported on the *This Ain't Hell* blog and later on *The Burn Pit* blog, Craig Monaco of Watertown, New York, was independently researching in Indiana. Cynthia Burton put me in touch with Craig, and he told me that he had contacted the local library in Washington, Indiana, and hit pay dirt. They sent him the 1981 obituary of Dimple Glass naming a son Paul of Washington, D.C. She had lived in the Prairie Village Nursing Home, and was buried in the Antioch Christian Church Cemetery in Daviess County--the cemetery where her mother was buried.

They also sent a 1935 article from the local paper, *The Washington Democrat* which related in gruesome detail the terrible accident that took the lives of Dimple's husband, Russell Glass, her 5 yr-old son, Russell, and her mother, Nora. Their car was stranded on a railroad track, and was hit by the train causing the bodies to be badly mangled and dragged along the tracks. The paper related:

"Rev. Russell Glass, aged about 34 years, an unemployed minister, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Nora Bell Owens, aged about 46, were instantly killed at 12:38 o'clock this afternoon when the light coupe in which they were riding was struck and demolished by B & O passenger train no. 62 at the Black Oak Crossing about four miles east of Washington. A small son of Rev. Glass about five years of age, was badly injured in the

crash and was brought to the Daviess county hospital in Gill's ambulance.”¹⁸

At first the newspaper claimed that little Russell, Jr. was only injured, but he apparently died later. Craig sent me copies of these documents, and we wondered if the surviving child, Paul, born ca 1933, might have been the dependent named in Richard's enlistment papers. Putting two and two together, we conjectured that perhaps Dimple had had a nervous breakdown and spent her life in a mental facility in Daviess County where she had been living at the time of the loss of her loved ones.

On Ancestry.com, they have a collection called "U.S. Phone and Address Directories 1993-2002." I found several references to a Paul Glass living at 2007 Wyoming Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. This same address was given for a Paul C. Glass who resided there 1993-1995. From then on, he was listed as Paul O. Glass. In 1998, his address changed to 725 24th St., NW, but the telephone number was the same from 1993 to 2002. So, I called repeatedly, but no one answered.

After "Googling" the address, I found it was for a retirement home in the District called St. Mary's Court. On an off-chance that I might get some information, I called them. The lady with whom I spoke said that she thought Mr. Glass had died recently [later I found that he had died in December, 2009]. This was crushing news. I tried calling the Administrator to see if we could find out who the next-of-kin had been, but the lady never called back. So, I notified the *Winchester Star* reporter, Cynthia Burton, and when she called, she had success...ah, the power of the press!

It was wonderful news to learn from Cynthia on March 7th that the person holding power of attorney to care for Mr. Glass was a daughter of Richard Owen's brother, Rev. George Earle Owen [Jr.]! That was our last big breakthrough, and I have since enjoyed talking with Mary Devon Owen Smith who is a wealth of information on the family. She has been both grateful and amazed at all the people who cared so much to find the family.

I also heard back from Brigid Schulte at *The Post* who forwarded an email she received from a Mr. Paul Woodall who had also given her the name of Mary Devon. I called Mr. Woodall and he was very gracious in sharing his memories of his friendship



Figure 11 Suzanne Marshall holding the Purple Heart medal and a picture of Richard Owen, Washington Post

¹⁸*The Times-Herald*, Washington, Indiana, issue of 6 September 1935, page 1.

with Paul Glass through their interest in chess although he didn't recall much conversation about his childhood growing up in Winchester.

So, we now had the name of a living relative on the Owen side of the family. Both reporters had tracked down members of the McCann family from Winchester, and it was obvious from their newspaper articles that the family had felt Richard E. Owen was very special to their Aunt Ruth.

Cynthia Burton, on March 4th, published a follow-up article in the *Winchester Star* where she wrote that Judy McCann-Slaughter had tracked down the great-niece of Ruth McCann Owen Milholland who had the actual Purple Heart medal.

Brigid Schulte's *Washington Post* article on March 6th reported that a great-niece of Ruth's, Suzanne Marshall, has his Bible, his gold watch, and the Purple Heart medal [see fig. 11], sister Ellen in Falls Church has his stamp collection, and a sister in California has a lock of his hair in a locket. The McCann family also has letters from the family to him while he was overseas, and they had a picture of Ruth McCann and Richard Owen on their wedding day, September 13, 1941 [fig. 12].

The Owen family, I'm sure, is extremely grateful to that caring family who saved so many mementos of their Uncle, Richard E. Owen.

After talking to Mary Devon Smith, I offered to prepare a genealogical report showing what all the researchers had been able to find on the Owen family, a biographical write up of Richard's life as we now know it, and this report on how the research was done. She was quite interested in our project and what all we have found so far.

She also had a memoir written by her father, Rev. George Earle Owen [Jr] in which he had prepared a genealogical chart that took the family back several generations on both her maternal and paternal sides. Craig Monaco and I were able to verify all this information and more. We traced the family back to a Thomas Owen b. 1797 in Kentucky.

The biggest news in Rev. George Earle Owen's memoir was the name of his mother



Figure 12 Ruth and Richard on their wedding day. Picture from the McCann family photos.

and information on her family. We had realized that Nora Bell was not the mother of George Earle Owen [Jr], who was one year old when his father, Rev. George Elvey Owen [Sr], remarried, but his mother had been a mystery. No longer. Her name was Minnie Ethel Berry, the daughter of Rev. Franklin Wayland Berry of Prince Edward County, Virginia. She had married Rev. George Elvey Owen [Sr] about 1907, and was living in a three-room log house in Montgomery County, Virginia, when her son, George Earle [Jr] was born. Sadly, she died two weeks later of blood poisoning.

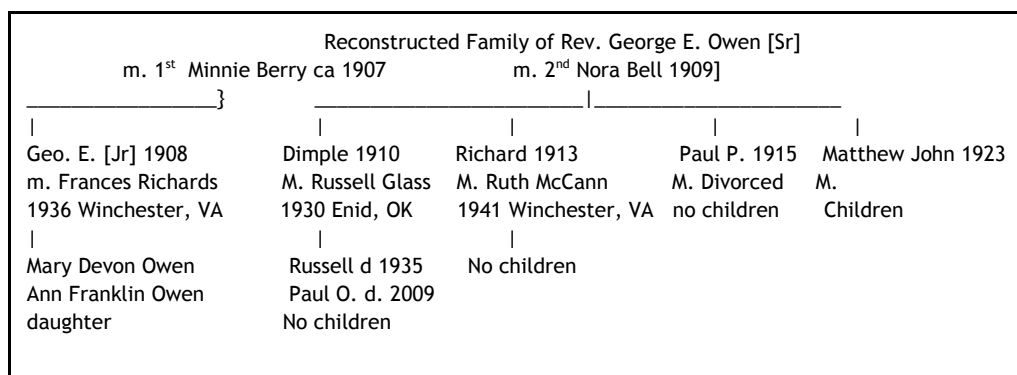
Mary kindly sent me about thirty pages from his work, and it was wonderful to have so many questions answered. Here is how George [Jr.] described the accident that killed his family members: "While I was living in Winchester, Virginia my step-mother, my brother-in-law, Russell Glass, who had married my step-sister Dimple, and one of their sons were all three killed in an accident near Montgomery, Indiana. Their car was struck by a train. It was a tragic circumstance. My step-sister never recovered from this shock and has been in a mental hospital since then."

This certainly verified what was surmised after finding Dimple in the Social Security Death Index. According to Rev. George's [Jr] autobiography, Dimple Glass's son, Paul, went to live for a short time with cousins in Jamestown, Ohio, where his father, Russell Glass, was from originally, but was returned to his grandfather, Rev. George E. Owen [Sr.], at his request. Rev. Owen left Daviess County and moved to Puxico, Stoddard County, Missouri. He died there in 1940, and Paul then came to Winchester where he lived with his Uncle Richard.

He apparently lived with Ruth and Richard after their marriage, and at the end of the war lived with his Uncle Paul Owen. After high school, Paul Glass left Winchester and joined the Navy. The saddest thing was that it was apparently only later in life that Paul found out that he was not an orphan after all.

Thus concludes the saga of the research conducted by a very special group of researchers and newspaper reporters to find the family of Sgt. Richard E. Owen. It was a pleasure for me to work with all these individuals who cared so much about one forgotten (we thought) soldier. We unraveled most of the mystery, and learned a lot about the family of this brave soldier.

The only remaining mystery may never be solved. How did his picture and Purple Heart citation find their way to a Salvation Army thrift store in upstate New York?



Researchers in the saga of Sgt. Richard E. Owen-
without this dedicated group, the story could never be told.

1) The Salvation Army

- a) Capt. Ron Heimbrock
- b) Robin McMahon posted clues from Ancestry for us to follow up including the New Castle, PA newspaper articles about the Owen family and their ministry there.
- c) Randy [last name unknown], recognized the importance of the citation.
- d) Rusty Charitier, began the online research.

2) Television reporters

- a) Corley Gordon, Nashville, TN interviewed John O'Brien historian at Ft. Campbell, KY, home of the 101st Airborne.
- b) Andrea Hatcher, Roanoke, VA interviewed Jeff Fulgham of the National D-Day Memorial who talked about plane 66 and the accident. They showed the picture and purple heart citation. They also found that someone [unnamed] had filled out the form for Sgt. Owen at the Memorial. Later it was determined that the widow Ruth McCann Owen Milhollen had submitted it.

3) Civilian researchers

- a) Craig Monaco, Watertown, NY, screen name "cmonaco2000." Craig was interested in the story right from the beginning, and would send the results of his research back to Capt. Heimbrock. He contacted the Library in Washington, IN, and obtained a copy of Dimple Glass's Obituary and a copy of the newspaper article telling of the car/train wreck that killed Nora Bell Owen, Russell Glass and his son, Russell.
- b) Harold Keisling, Cookeville, TN, saw the story on the Nashville TV station and he and

his cousin, Cleston Conner. Contacted Ellen Murphy and sent her results of their research. Harold received a version of Owen's service record from Cpt. James A. Page, US Army. I have not been able to verify the source since Capt. Page has not replied to my email. Cleston was researching on a parallel line with me which was interesting to find out about as I was writing this article.

- d) Ellen Murphy, Commissioner of Revenue, Frederick Co., VA, in turn contacted Adrian O'Conner, the Editorial Page Editor of *The Winchester Star*.

4) Military researchers

- a) Mark Seavey of the American Legion's *The Burn Pit* blog -main force behind the search for Sgt. Owen's family
- b) Veterans of the 506th Airborne
- c) Veterans of Easy Company.
- e) Dave Berry of Pathfinder Historical Consultants -helped Mark in his search
- f) "Brown Neck Gaitor," name unknown-found Ruth Milhollen's obituary
- g) "Old Trooper," name unknown, worked on finding members of the 506th.
- h) "The Sniper," name unknown
- I) Guy Lepretre of The Forced Landing Association, Belgium. Wrote the terrific article about Plane 66 and the crash in Normandy.

5) Milblog posters on *This Ain't Hell* and *The Burn Pit*

- a) Deb Leonard of *Yankee Mom* blog-obtained Richard's marriage record
- b) Denise Amundson, screen name "DefendUSA64"
- c) "Fe Fe"-tracked down Rev. J. Floyd Wine, who had known Richard when he worked at the Post Office.
- d) Henry Lee-invaluable help finding the family in the 1930 census, WWI Registration card, etc.
- e) Mary B. Griffen
- f) Mary McCampbell Bell, CG [author of article, professional genealogist]
- g) Marie V. Melchiori, CG- helped verify Sgt. Owen's serial number [professional genealogist and military records specialist]

6) Newspaper reporters

- a) Bob Beckard, the Watertown Daily News
- b) Cynthia Burton, *The Winchester Star*
- c) Adrian O'Connor, *The Winchester Star*
- d) Brigid Schulte, *The Washington Post*