



Sharpsburg Town Crier

Max Grim and Warren Davis Edition



Volume 32

December 2024

Number 12

Max Swain: His Heartbreaking Death and the Extraordinary Journey of His Remains *Not all Christmas Stories are Merry.*

It was 80 years ago during one of the coldest European winters in a century. It was this very time of year.

On December 16, 1944, the German Wehrmacht mounted a desperate attack on Allied Forces as they hunkered down in the cold and the snow of the quiet Ardennes Forest in Belgium. We call it the Battle of the Bulge because of the swelling on the map the front made into Allied lines. It is thought by historians to be the second largest battle, after the Normandy Invasion six months earlier, ever experienced by American forces. Germany hoped to split the Allied armies, force peace negotiation, boost German morale, and delay the advance into the Fatherland. It ended in disaster for them but not before visiting destruction on the Allies.

Max Swain was killed five days after the launch of the attack. He and his comrades were overrun and surrounded by German artillery thunder in every direction; they must have thought the war was lost. But I get ahead of myself.

Born in 1924, into a local family (Swain/DeLauney) and lived the normal life of a young man in the time. He was the son of Mary (DeLauney) and Clifford Swain. He was the son of a grocer. He was a model-maker. His close relatives relate the story that at the outbreak of World War II he wanted to enlist in the U.S. Army Air Corps. It was not to be.



Clifford and Mary Swain, his parents



Max and his younger brother Richard in better times.

Max was assigned to a Heavy Weapons Company (Company H, 423rd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division) as a Staff Sergeant and had three mortar squads under him. After three days of fighting, they had run out of ammunition and were cut off from any hope of resupply nor even rescue. Desperate to try and find a way out and assuming they were totally surrounded, the regimental commander instructed Max's squads to attempt to find an escape route to the west and the American/British lines. Max was in the passenger's seat of the lead of three Jeeps when they encountered German machine guns. According to an eyewitness account from a man who was in the vehicle directly behind him, Max was killed instantly and most of the men in the second and third Jeeps were wounded and taken prisoner. The entire unit surrendered en masse shortly after Max was killed. Max was initially listed as Missing in Action, and then in

February 1946, the Army officially declared him dead. It was known then as a Finding of Death (i.e.; presumed dead, no body recovered).

This is where the story of his missing remains take a near miraculous turn.

Max's body was discovered by the caretaker of a German soldier's cemetery near Bleialf, Germany in July 1947, some distance from the site of his death in Belgium. The only identification the corpse had was the book of addresses that his mother, Mary, had given him. The caretaker contacted his son-in-law, still a POW in England, about how to proceed. The son-in-law received permission to contact the Mayor of Hagerstown. That started a series of events.

Max was reburied in a military cemetery in Belgium and then in June 1949, his remains were finally returned home to be buried in the Antietam National Cemetery. You may visit him there. When you enter the cemetery, look to the left at the end of the first row of grave-stones. Max's stone is the bright white one on the very left.

The family still has the letter that the caretaker's son-in-law sent to the Mayor of Hagerstown.

Here is the text.

Broughton Hall
Broughton
nr (near?) Skipton
Yorkshire
England

To whom it may concern,

I am a German prisoner of war working in England at the above address. My father-in-law has written from Germany to say that he has discovered the grave of 6 American soldiers. On one of these soldiers was an identity pocket-book bearing the inscription S/Sgt. Maxwell L. Swain.

112 So Cannonn Avenue
Hagerstown MD

My father in law has reburied the bodies in separate graves in the village of Bleialf. The graves are now well cared for and my two children put flowers on them each week.

My family wonder if this is the first information you have received of S/Sgt. Maxwell L. Swain.

My father in law has reported this to the French Military Government but he does not know if they took it further. If you want to write to him his address is as follows:

Michel Blum
22b Bleialf
Post (?) Prüm (?) (Eifel)
Germany

Broughton Hall
Skipton
nr Skipton
Yorkshire
England.

To whom it may concern,

I am a German prisoner of war working in England at the above address. My father-in-law has written from Germany to say that he has discovered the grave of 6 American soldiers. One of these bodies was an identity pocket-book bearing the inscription: S/Sgt. Maxwell L. Swain

112 So Cannonn Avenue
Hagerstown, M. D.

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My family wonder if this is the first information you have received of S/Sgt. Maxwell L. Swain

My father in law has reported this to the French Military Government but he does not know if they took it further. If you want to write to him his address is as follows:

Michel Blum
22b Bleialf
Post Prüm (Eifel)
Germany
Grand zone.

If you require he will try to get you a photograph of the grave. But as things are very difficult in Germany now it might take some time

Yours faithfully
Josef Lindner

French zone

If you require he will try to get you a photograph of the grave. But as things are very difficult in Germany now it might take some time.

Yours faithfully

Josef Linden

Imagine how nearly miraculous it is that two men who were on the other side of the conflict and who had nothing to gain took steps to return Max's remains to his parents and the nation. More miraculous still is that we know their names, Josef Linden and Michel Blum.

As with all narratives, there are tantalizing gaps. For example, who transported the bodies across the Belgian border into Germany for mass and anonymous burial? Was it the Germans wanting to conceal American remains? After all, the Malmedy Massacre¹ had occurred four days before Max's death.

These events give us an opportunity to contemplate the human tragedy of war and especially the brutal events of December 1944 and



into January 1945. This is the second Crier article that relates a sad story about the Swain family, see also the June 2023 installment.

¹ - The Malmedy Massacre was one of several war crimes committed against American units during the Bulge. At Malmedy eighty-four American POWs were killed rather than being sent to POW camps. It is thought that Hitler communicated his policy that the “no-prisoners” strategy then being used by them against the Russians was to be used during this offensive against Allied soldiers.

- Editor

2024 Town Crier Feature Article Re-Cap

You can read these 2024 feature articles online at: <https://sharpsburgmd.com/town-crier/>

January: **Warren “Woodpecker” Davis: A Man of This Place, A Family Man, A Community Man, and A Decorated Hero**

February: **The Story of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church: It’s Really All About The Town, Installment 1**

March: **The Story of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church: It’s Really All About The Town, Installment 2**

April: **Beginner Tips for Growing Vegetables and Here’s Why, Heidi Vertrees**

May: **The Amazing Odyssey of the Mumma Bible**

June: **Love, Devotion, Mentorship...and Baked Goods**

July: **Artifact of the Month, a Puzzle, and a Little History of the C&O Canal**

August: **“After I shot him down, all I wanted to do was get the Hell out of there...”:** **Hugh David Chapman, WWII Pilot, Sharpsburg Boy**

September: **The “64” and Its Long Journey Home**

October: **"Don't Shoot Me Anymore, Charlie!"**

November: **Thanksgiving Message from the Editor**

December: **Max Swain: His Heartbreaking Death and the Extraordinary Journey of His Remains**

From the Mayor and Council

Miss Sharpsburg and Runner Up

The Mayor and Council have chosen next year's Miss Sharpsburg and Runner Up. The Sharpsburg Town Crier congratulates Miss Reagan Smith (Miss Sharpsburg 2025) and runner up Miss Harlow Mason.



Reagan

Harlow

May they reign over an era of peace, prosperity, and goodwill.

- Editor

NOTICE REGARDING NEW TOWN TRASH COLLECTION CONTRACT.

Under the new contract with Apple Valley Waste that becomes effective January 1, 2025, each residence will receive 1 free trash container. AVW will be delivering these contain-

ers the last week of December and the 1st week of January. Contact town hall if you have any questions at 301.432.4428 or email at townofsharpsburg@comcast.net

About the Town

Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Company Fund Drive

The SVFC Fund Drive is underway. Check out their poster on Pages 9 and 10 to read about their current plans for the year ahead.

Artifact of the Month: Stained Glass Window

Sadly, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church closed its doors for worship several years ago, ending its history as the biggest church community in our town. A large proportion of settlers in Sharpsburg were German and naturally found comfort within those walls. The Editor had the privilege of having a last long look inside the place last year. In the west facing wall is a striking stained glass window depicting Martin Luther, whose legacy formed the major theological zeitgeist of the town. Note the white scroll which records the names of Trinity's ministers. There will come a time when we wish we had those doors open again for worship.

- Editor



Monthly Luncheon at the Brethren Church

The Sharpsburg Church of the Brethren held their monthly luncheon that was Christmas themed. We had ham, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, pork and sauerkraut, green beans with potatoes, baked pineapple, shrimp and all kinds of other dishes. Not to mention the desert table.

For our entertainment we had a Christmas reading by Heidi, musical number by Robert and we all sang Christmas carols. Ida drew names for prizes.

Our next luncheon will be January 8th at 12 noon and will be New Years themed. Any questions you can call pastor Brad at 240-703-1563

- Pastor Graybill

Editor's Note: The attached Community Calendar includes these luncheons under "Recurring Events."

COMMANDERS OF ANTIETAM IS HERE!

Mark your calendars! On Thursday, February 20th at 6:00pm the Sharpsburg Library and the Antietam Institute will co-host the "Meet the Authors of the Commanders of Antietam" event.

The event will be held in McKinley Hall at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Sharpsburg. Come on out to meet the editors, Kevin Pawlak and Brad Gottfried as well as a number of the contributors of the book. The authors will briefly discuss the book, their favorite commander they wrote about, and be on hand afterwards to sign your copy.

Books will also be available for purchase.

The "Commanders of Antietam" takes a unique approach by providing a biography of every (191) brigade, division, and corps/wing commanders in the infantry, cavalry, and artil-

lery in the Union Army of the Potomac and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. Each section is divided into three parts: Before the Maryland Campaign, The Maryland Campaign, and After the Maryland Campaign. The 44 expert authors drew heavily on first-person accounts and primary sources to weave a compelling story about each commander at Antietam.

Kevin Pawlak and Brad Gottfried are the editors of this volume. It is the third in a series of books focused on different aspects of the campaign, including "Brigades of Antietam" (edited by Bradley Gottfried) and "Artillery of Antietam" (by James A. Rosebrock), both published by the Antietam Institute.

Regards,

Chris Vincent

President

Antietam Institute

info@antietaminstitute.org

Community Calendar (December/April)

January All Month: **Spice of the Month, Sumac Berries**

Pick up your sample and information
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

January 6 at 6PM: **Town Council Meeting**

Sharpsburg Town Hall
106 E Main St, Sharpsburg, MD
21782
301-432-4428

January 15 at 5PM: **Kids Movie Night, "Harold and the Purple Crayon"**

Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

January 22 at 1:30PM: **Home-school Book Club, "Wind in the Willows" by Kenneth Grahame**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

January 29 at 6PM: **Our Local Birds of Prey**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

February All Month: **Spice of the Month, Galangal**
Pick up your sample and information
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

February 5 at 1PM: **Adult Book Share**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Week of February 11: **Puzzle Swap**
(anytime the Library's open)
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

February 12 at 5PM: **Movie Night "Lincoln"**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

February 12 at 1:30PM: **"Corduroy" by Don Freeman**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

February 13 at 3:30PM: **Valentine's Party**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

February 20 at 6PM: **Meet the Authors of 'The Commanders of Antietam'**
at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 209 West Main Street

Sponsored by
Sharpsburg Library, 301-432-8825
and
Antietam Institute, presi-
dent@antietaminstitute.org

March All Month: **Spice of the Month, Sassafras**
Pick up your sample and information
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 5 at 1PM: **Adult Book Share**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 6 at 3:30PM: **American Women in History Story Times**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 12 at 1:30PM: **"How to Train Your Dragon" by Cressida Cowell**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 13 at 3:30PM: **American Women in History Story Times**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 15 from 10AM to 2PM: **Fourth Annual Metal Detecting Exhibit**
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
209 W. Main St.
Sponsored by the Sharpsburgh Mu-
seum of History
(301) 800-6877 /
Ed.Beeler@sharpsburghmuseumofhi-
story.com



*Just what a
small town
should be*

Week of March 18: **Leprechaun Hunt** (anytime the Library's open, ages 6-12)
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 20 at 3:30PM: **American Women in History Story Times**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 26 at 6PM: **Attracting Hummingbirds**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

March 27 at 3:30: **Community Story Time, Wildflowers!**
Meet behind Ferry Hill, 16500
Sharpsburg Pike
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

April 2 at 6PM : **Discussion about the Spice of the Month**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Recurring Events

Second Wednesdays from 12Noon to 1:30PM: **Lunch and Fellowship at the Brethren Church**
123 E Main St.
301-432-4944 / sharpsburgcob@outlook.com

First Wednesdays of the month at 1PM **Adults: Book Share**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Thursdays at 3:30PM: **Storytime** (Ages 3 and Up)
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Second Thursdays every month, **Lion's Club** 7PM, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 209 W. Main St, Sharpsburg, MD 21782
sharpsburglions@gmail.com

First Saturdays at 10AM: **Lego Club**
Sharpsburg Library
301-432-8825

Area Churches

Christ Reformed Church
117 West Main Street
Sharpsburg
301-432-6182
Sundays: 9AM

United Christian Fellowship
18823 Shepherdstown Pike, Keedysville, MD 21756
301-432-0110
Sundays: 8:45AM Fellowship, 9AM Sunday School, 10AM Worship & Children's Church

Sharpsburg Church of the Brethren
123 E Main St, Sharpsburg
Sundays at 10AM, Sunday School at 10:30AM
301-432-4944

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
209 West Main Street
Sharpsburg
301-432-7098
Sundays: 10AM, Sunday School (Second and Fourth Sundays starting September 25)



Burnside First Church of God
3904 Mills Rd, Sharpsburg
Sunday Worship - 9:00am, Sunday
School - 10:15am

Sharpsburg Bible Church
5134 General Stuart Court, Sharps-
burg
301-432-5309
Sunday School 9:30 AM to 10:30
AM, Sunday Morning Worship & Chil-
dren's Church 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM

Mayor & Councilpersons

Russ Weaver – Mayor
Jacob Martz – Vice Mayor
Randy Short – Council (elect)
Heather Waters – Council (elect)
Ed Beeler-Council
Robbie Waters – Council
Joe Kudla – Council
(Debbie Smith – Town Clerk)

106 East Main Street

PO Box 368

Sharpsburg, Maryland 21782

Phone: 301-432-4428

Fax: 301-432-8990

<https://sharpsburgmd.com/>

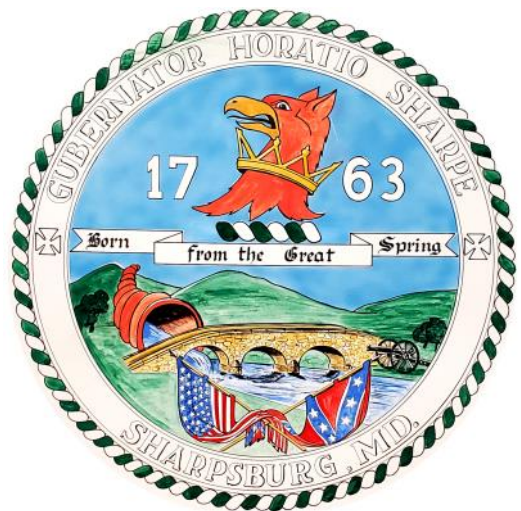
townofsharpsburg@comcast.net

[https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/TheTownOfSharpsburg)

TheTownOfSharpsburg

Zoning Administrator-Tim Lung

Sharpsburg.md.zoning@gmail.com



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ATACHHMENT:

SHARPSBURG VOLUNTEER FIRE CO.

2024 FUND DRIVE



Happy Holidays from the Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Company! As volunteers of SVFC, we are dedicated to making our community the best possible place to live, visit, play, and work, providing over 24,500 hours of service in 2024. The SVFC continues to adapt and grow, standing ready to protect and help the community in times of need, but we need your help. Since 1943, the SVFC has been responsible for protecting approximately 6,800 residents spread across 40 square miles. In 2024, we will respond to approximately 740 emergency calls for fire, rescue, and advanced life support. We have a team of around 50 active responders, consisting of highly trained volunteers and career staff. Our main goals are to save lives, minimize losses, and ensure the safety of our community. As the regional response center for Southern Washington County, our station is staffed 24 hours a day, providing emergency responses not only to our community but also to neighboring areas, which increases our coverage to 60,000 residents.

In order to maintain our level of service delivery, we need \$320,000 for the fiscal year 2025. The Washington County Government provides \$220,000 of support, but we still need to raise \$100,000 from our local community. We rely on various sources of funding such as this fund-drive, fundraising events, grants, donations, and gaming proceeds. The annual fund-drive is our biggest and most dependable source of local funding, covering 30% of our needs. Unfortunately, over the past 3 years, only 18.2% of residents have made donations. **We request each individual residence donate at least \$50, and families donate \$75 if possible.** Your contribution will go a long way in saving lives and improving the quality of life in our community.

2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2024, SVFC made significant strides, including reducing its ISO rating from 9/6 to 4, upgrading key equipment like the Brush Truck and Engine Tanker, and adding a pitched roof to the annex. The department deployed new PPE, portable radios, and rescue tools, while certifying six new volunteers and logging over 1,500 hours of state and national training. Local training exceeded 2,500 hours, and the company provided safety education to 350+ residents. SVFC restored a 1964 Engine, donated equipment to hurricane-affected departments in North Carolina, and ordered a new Engine Tanker for 2028. Other improvements included resurfacing the station floor and adding an SCBA filling station.



COMING IN 2025

In 2025, SVFC plans to replace outdated fire hoses and nozzles, and add a station exhaust filtering system to improve air quality. The department will continue deploying upgraded equipment and focus on extensive responder training, alongside ongoing fire prevention efforts. Additionally, the company aims to develop new firefighting and rescue techniques to enhance its operational effectiveness.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You can help our community's emergency services in many different ways. If you want to be an active responder, you can receive free training. We also need volunteers to support us with fundraising, administration, facility maintenance, public education, and more. Financially, we rely on funding from the community, which directly improves public safety. It is crucial for everyone to participate in our fund-drive, so please make an effort to contribute. Please support and spread the word about our fundraising events throughout the year. Also, consider us for business donations and grants, and let your local politicians know that you support our efforts to keep the community safe.

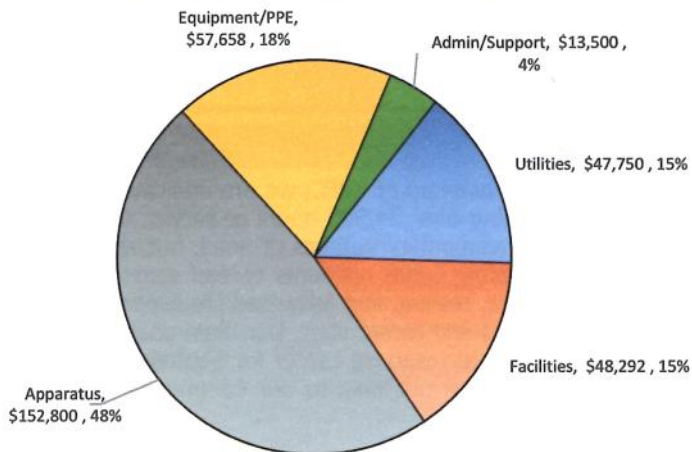


email: sharpsburgvfc@gmail.com

website: sharpsburgvfc.org

FB: www.facebook.com/sharpsburgvfc1

2025 Budget (\$320K)



WHY IS YOUR HELP NEEDED?

This message is created, distributed, and handled entirely by SVFC volunteers. No donations will leave our community. Please be aware that any other requests for donations are not authorized by or supportive of the SVFC. 100% of the funds we collect will be used to provide emergency apparatus and equipment, which will benefit our community for many years to come.

The rising costs in the fire and rescue field pose a significant challenge for small communities like ours. SVFC is currently saving money to replace our 1998 engine tanker at a cost of \$1.3 million. Although 55% of this cost is covered by a federal grant the additional 45% must be provided by SVFC. We are also making improvements to our facilities. The funds raised through our fundraising efforts will be directly allocated to these projects.

To maximize the impact of your donations, SVFC is actively seeking competitive grants and engaging in local fundraising activities. Your generous support is crucial in providing the necessary equipment to save lives and protect property.



If you would like to make an ONLINE donation follow these PayPal directions.

1. Login to your personal Paypal Account and click SEND & REQUEST at the top of the page.
2. Enter this email address in the send money box: sharpsburgvfc@gmail.com
3. Type the AMOUNT you would like to donate and click ADD A NOTE to enter your full name and indicate that it is for your 2023 donation.
4. Click CONTINUE and select your address and payment type then click SEND PAYMENT now.
5. You will have a record for your taxes by printing your receipt from paypal.
6. All electronic transfer fees are deducted from the amount received by the SVFC.

email: sharpsburgvfc@gmail.com

website: sharpsburgvfc.org

FB: www.facebook.com/sharpsburgvfc1