

2020

PFC Eliséé Dutil - "The Crucifix"

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PFC Eliseé Dutil

“The Crucifix”

PFC Eliséé Dutil and "The Crucifix"

In preparing this historical military history of the Mailhot and Dutil families, my connection with my mother's baby brother and the uncle whom I'd never met, PFC Eliséé Dutil would become a life changing event.

The similarities we shared from our family roots on Bartlett Street and upbringings at the Basilica in Lewiston were inspiring as well as emotional.

Eliséé's beginnings on Bartlett Street and his strong Catholic faith, nurtured at SS Peter & Paul Parish made the 75 years that separated us seem unimportant as I began to appreciate his short and much too brief life, a life filled with many accomplishments, especially discovering a beautiful *poem-inspired prayer* he wrote from a foxhole which he called "*My Crucifix*," written on the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead in 1944, the prayer that became my encouragement to pursue a calling later in life to a religious vocation of an ordained deacon in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland.

It is most fitting that I focused and concluded this historical military journey with the prayer, "*My Crucifix*," surely divinely inspired, along with the personal message that PFC Eliséé Dutil wrote and dedicated to his brothers-in-harm, near the end of his life.

"For the Men in the Foxholes"

*"Men, please don't forget, read this prayer every moment of the day,
and also don't forget to say your Act of Contrition
perfect, every day and night.*

*Say also, soldiers, five times, Our Father, Hail Mary, and a Glory be etc.
for the Holy Father and the Church.*

*Please soldiers don't forget to say every day and night,
'My Good Lord, I offer Thee this day, or night,'
all I shall do or think or say,*

uniting it with what was done on earth by Jesus Christ Thy Son.

*I wish you soldiers the best of luck,
and pray God will bless and protect you always."*

Author: Pfc. Eliséé A. Dutil, better known as "Frenchie," Regt'l Hq. 7th
Infantry, U.S. Army

“My Crucifix”

*A little crucifix,
As plain as it can be,
But only God in Heaven knows
How dear it is to me.*

*I have it always with me,
In every step I take;
At evening when I slumber,
At morning when I awake.*

*In bright or cloudy weather,
In sunshine or in rain:
In happiness or sorrow,
In pleasure or in pain.*

*It helps me in my struggles,
It reproves me when I sin;
Its look of gentle patience
Rebukes the strife within.*

*In days of pain and anguish,
The greatest Help I knew
Was to hold that little crucifix
Until I calmer grew;*

*And looking on that Figure,
Which hung in patience there,
I saw the dreadful torture
Which He, in Love, did bear.*

*His feet are nailed together,
His loving arms outspread,
And blood is dropping slowly down
From His thorn-crowned Head.*

*And how could I then murmur,
Or bitterly complain,
When love for me induced Him
To undergo such pain?*

*So when the time approaches
That I shall have to die,
I hope that little crucifix
Will close besides me lie;*

*That the Holy Name of Jesus
May be the last that I shall say,
And kissing that dear crucifix
My soul may pass away.*

†

Eliséé A. Dutil

During 2020, especially on Memorial Day and Veteran's Day, we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, remembering all the brave men and brave women who *died for our freedom, our children's freedom and the world's freedom.*

It is my hope and prayer that copies of Eliséé prayer found its way into the hands of all the soldiers 'in the foxholes' he served with, especially those who passed away into the loving and eternal embrace of God.

Since the end of WWII, my mother, Leona, traded Christmas cards each December with the Catholic Priest Chaplain who had served in the same unit and become a friend with Eliséé. After my mother passed, another Christmas card arrived from the Chaplain who had not heard of her death. I decided to mail him a final Christmas card alerting him that mom had passed away a few weeks before Christmas. And to my joy and surprise, I received the following hand-written note from 'Fr. Mike:'

"Dear Denis, Leona Mailhot, a sister to Eliséé Dutil, may she rest in peace. I was on the Anzio Beachhead that Eliséé wrote that beautiful poem. The good Sisters from North Dakota {Carmelite Nuns, Carmel of Mary, Wahpeton, North Dakota}, informed about the poem, prepared a Holy Prayer Card with the "Prayer to Jesus Crucified" Ecclesiastical Approbation on the back side and the "My Crucifix" prayer on the inside, along with Eliséé A. Dutil's name as its author. I've been retired for 21 years and do offer my daily Masses for all of us, the living and the dead. I'm the oldest priest in my diocese."

I later researched Fr. Mike's priestly ministry and discovered his obituary that included: "Rev. Mitchell J. "Fr. Mike" Koprowski, 97, died Dec. 14, 2010, in his home after a long illness. *He served in the US Army as a Chaplain during World War II from 1943 to 1946, with the Third Infantry Division and was at the Anzio beachhead during the invasion of Southern France.*" I could not have asked for a better confirmation of exactly when and where my uncle, Eliseé wrote that beautiful poem and prayer.

September 2, 2020 marked the 75th Commemoration of the end of World War II. On 2020 Memorial Day, it was my hope that PFC *Eliseé A. Dutil's* prayer serves to inspire all of us that we are never alone, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, so that we may unite as one community, one state and one nation under God to work as one, collectively, to defeat this new adversary as we did 75 years ago, as one nation, when Eliseé wrote that prayer on the Anzio beachhead dedicated to the brave men and women and their families that we are now forever indebted.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower called the D-Day operation a crusade in which, "we will accept nothing less than full victory." As we strive to defeat another world-wide enemy, the *coronavirus*, may we safeguard our families and friends while being mindful, respectful and considerate of the needs and struggles of everyone around us until success is attained and the virus is defeated, and the world discovers the lasting *Peace, Paix, Paz, Salam, Mir, Héping, Pace, Pax*, offered to all from the heart of Jesus Christ, and this will then be the 'full victory' for all of humanity.

My dear uncle, PFC Eliseé A. Dutil, a much belated 'may your soul rest in peace,' Your nephew, Deacon Denis Wilfrid Mailhot, MPS

*The Lewiston-Auburn Veterans Council dedicated the 32nd monument on Memorial Day 2020 at the Veterans Memorial Park located on the corner of Main and Lincoln Streets, Lewiston, Maine. The monuments serve as an inspirational testament to men and women who have served our country within all branches of the U.S. military. The 32nd monument is inscribed: "Elisee A. Dutil, US Army (USA) WWII" side A, left column, 33 down. **Less we forget!***