

„Who's Wiley?“ –

On the trail of the namesake of Wiley, Neu-Ulm

by Eberhard A. Merk

„Wiley? Who's Wiley?“ – asked the new *Public Affairs Officer* (PAO) of the *US Military Community Activity* (USMCA), Sergeant Ed McCarthy, on his arrival in Neu-Ulm at the end of November 1976. At that time, almost none of the more than 3,000 soldiers stationed at the Neu-Ulm base would have been able to answer that question, he surmised. Even the families of the GIs, the German comrades in the German Army and most of the Ulm/Neu-Ulm civilian population would have been unable to answer that question.

In November 1976, plans were afoot to celebrate the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Neu-Ulmer base. PAO McCarthy had committed himself to promoting the remembrance culture of the USMCA Neu-Ulm and published an article in the base's bi-monthly newspaper (*The Donau Republic*) entitled *Silver Salute: Who's Wiley?*, which briefly described the history of the namesake of *Wiley Barracks*.

45 years later, celebrations are due again. Neu-Ulm is celebrating a double anniversary. 70 years ago (1951) the US-American base was founded and 30 years ago (1991) the base, which for a time had held Pershing II type medium-range missiles, was closed. Much has remained from these almost 40 years of US military presence, not least the name Wiley. Both then and now, the question “What or who is Wiley actually” remains largely unanswered.

Ludendorff Barracks, *New Ludendorff* and *Wiley Barracks*

By mid-November 1951 the first divisions of the 110th infantry Regiment (IR) of the US Army had prepared the Neu-Ulm garrison for the arrival of a larger contingent of troops. Within a few years, in accordance with the Atlantic Charter and the Truman doctrine, the Americans had transitioned from conquerors, liberators and occupiers, to protectors and guarantors of peace, freedom and prosperity – at least in the eyes of the American leaders and a growing proportion of German politicians and the general population.

In order to prevent any attack on the young federal republic, which was at the time deemed probable, and at the same time to psychologically cement the integration with the West, the allied occupational forces increased their military presence in their respective zones. To this end, the existing garrison was to be extended at Germany's cost to accommodate new installations.

The twin towns of Ulm and Neu-Ulm, located in the American zone, both pressed the planners commissioned with the task of finding a new site to decide in their favour. Particularly the smaller town of Neu-Ulm, with its already existing military facilities and enough room for expansion, offered the prerequisites necessary for the settlement of a larger American base. The still unsolved problems of denazification and democratisation of the only partially sovereign (West) German states were increasingly left to the questionable moral competence of the Germans themselves, or else silently left unchallenged. The new enemies were in in Moscow und Peking.

In autumn 1951, construction work began for an extensive new barracks under the name of *New Ludendorff Barracks* on the former parade ground to the south of the original Neu-Ulm Ludendorff Barracks built in 1935 (Memminger Straße). This had been used after the war initially as a prisoner-of-war camp and later as a camp for displaced persons. At the site where between 1946 and 1948 the Jewish underground militia *Hagana* had prepared Polish (DPs) for resettlement in Palestine, German passers-by could now marvel at the speed of the building work and the pragmatism of the Americans.

With time, further divisions of the 110th IR (National Guard) from Pennsylvania were stationed in both the *New Ludendorff*, as well as in the old Ludendorff Barracks. The *Vorfeld Family Housing Area* to the south of the Ringstraße was also gradually occupied. On June 02 1953 an order came from the Command Headquarters of the US Army in Europe (HQ USAREUR), to rename the *New Ludendorff* and the (old) Ludendorff Barracks *Wiley Barracks*, in honour of the commander of the Regiment's rifle company who had been killed in battle during WWII. The name of this company commander was Captain Robert Calvin Wiley.

#### Robert Calvin Wiley (1907-1944)

Robert Calvin Wiley, known as Bob, was born on June 03 1907 on his father's farm in Richhill Township, Greene County, Pennsylvania to the far south of the state bordering West Virginia in the heart of the coal mining region of the Allegheny Mountains. Bob Wiley had both British (*Scots-Irish*), and German ancestry. His maternal great grandparents were from North Baden. His parents, Gordon Wiley (1879-1955) and Pearl Lena nee Bowers (1882-1963), brought Robert up in the Calvinistic religion of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Bob Wiley was the oldest of seven siblings. An older brother had died as a child.

The young Bob attended the little church and schoolhouse in neighbouring Rock Lick, Marshall County, West Virginia. After completing high school, Wiley continued his education at the nearby Waynesburg College (now Waynesburg University). Here he took up wrestling and shot-put, and quickly advanced to become a prominent member of the local football team, the Waynesburg

Yellow Jackets.

At more than 1,90 m in height and weighing almost 110 Kg, Bob was a true heavyweight. He is said to have been the strongest man in the district. He never lacked the necessary fighting spirit, either as a player or as a trainer. He celebrated successes as a fair sportsman and bore defeats with a certain amount of self-irony, always ready to do better next time. He always regarded the team sport of football as a school for life.

He retained his very friendly, in fact jovial manner after his finals in 1930 and the start of his career as a teacher in various High Schools in the region. Wiley, who taught mathematics and chemistry, was well known in the county and beyond for his affability and humour. Friends and acquaintances remember him for his idiosyncratic, sonorous laugh. He also knew how to impress the ladies with his dancing skills. Bob Wiley was a valued personality and was regarded as a good match.

During his time as a football trainer while teaching at the Center Township High School in Rogersville in the 1930's, he delivered spectacular neighbourhood duels with his younger brother, Asa Gordon Wiley Jr. (1911-1995), known as Ace. These matches, which were anticipated with tense excitement in the whole county, cemented his status as a (living) legend in the region's sporting history.

On November 29, 1933 he married the one year younger Rona nee Tuttle (1908-1977) in Waynesburg. A son, Robert Charles, was born to the couple in 1937. A daughter, named Mary Ellen, was born in 1943.

#### *Pennsylvania National Guard and military career*

Wiley enlisted as a college student in the local *Waynesburg National Guard Armory* (since 1999 *Robert C. Wiley Armory*) in K Company of 110<sup>th</sup> IR (*Enlistment*) on March 21, 1928 as a College student. Most of the company members came from Greene County. Wiley remained faithful to his company even after he had begun his career as a teacher. In the 1930's he was also able to interest a large number of his pupils and players for voluntary service with the National Guard.

When the 110<sup>th</sup> IR was mobilised as part of the American war preparations in 1941 and placed under US Army command (*Federalizing*), Bob had already been appointed First Sergeant (= Kompaniefeldwebel o. Spieß).

Following mobilisation, the company and regiment often changed location for training exercises and the young family moved their home likewise. The drill and military training, however, did not come up to the expectations of the generals. The units of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (= Keystone Division) simply did not have enough competent officers. This is one of the reasons why Wiley was

appointed Second Lieutenant in February 1941, and First Lieutenant a year later. He served as platoon leader, Chief of K Company, regiment adjutant and for some time also as Executive Officer (= Stellvertretender Kommandeur) of the *Officer Candidate School (Infantry)* in Fort Benning, Georgia.

During this time, the generals disapproved of the strong traditional link with local fellow countrymen, especially among the National Guard units. Wiley was therefore given command of A Company of the 110<sup>th</sup> IR. He was eventually appointed Captain (= Hauptmann) on October 26, 1942. It would take him more than two and a half years to get the poorly equipped and sparsely manned units of Keystone Division ready for combat.

After stays in Pineville, Louisiana and Tallahassee, Florida, Rona Wiley had returned to Waynesburg. She was pregnant with their daughter Mary Ellen at that time. When Robert Wiley and the 110<sup>th</sup> IR were due to be shipped to Wales as part of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in September 1943, he had only a few days to hold his new born daughter in his arms and to say goodbye to his family. They were all hoping for a speedy return, of course.

### *Combat ready*

Since late summer in 1943 the German army had been forced into the defensive on all fronts and the National Socialist regime began to lose the allegiance of the public at the centre of the Reich. At the same rate that doubts about the leadership and rumours about the destiny of the so-called people's community grew, so the will for destruction and the fatalism of Hitler's Germany increased. An invasion of the European continent, landing at the Belgian-French channel coast somewhere between Ostend and Cherbourg, was meanwhile only a matter of time – Atlantic wall or not. German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel (1891-1944) supreme commander of Army Group B also knew this.

After its arrival in Pembrokeshire, Wales, the 110<sup>th</sup> IR trained for the planned landing from the end of 1943 to the end of June 1944, among other locations at the Assault Training Center of the US Army in Woolacombe in Devonshire.

In 1943 Keystone Division celebrated Christmas far away from home. Wiley sent a loving letter to his family, especially addressing his son Bobby. His father explained to him that, unlike little Robert and his friends in America, the children in Wales and England would not have much for Christmas. Captain Wiley therefore invited them to a *Christmas party* in the *Army camp*, in order to share with them some of the abundant food and sweets. In this way, on the other hand, the GIs would not miss their own children and families quite so much. “*Well, Bobby, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.*“, adding encouragingly, “*Take care of our family until I get back.*”

Bob Wiley was given more than one opportunity to demonstrate his strong leadership. When the discipline in one notorious unit (C Company) had left much to be desired for the umpteenth time, the battalion commander ordered him to attend to the matter once and for all. Without hesitation, Wiley had the whole company called into the exercise yard and told them that he had heard that there were a few trouble makers among them. If any of them wanted to take him on, they could say so at any time and fight it out with him, man to man. Nobody dared to accept the challenge. From then on there was no more trouble in the troop. Wiley respected his boys, some of whom had experienced him as a teacher and trainer and had also heard much through anecdotes

They rewarded his personal integrity with devotion, loyalty and almost limitless veneration.

He refused promotion to Major and the associated regimental staff. He saw it as his obligation to fight beside his young comrades and to go to war against the Axis Powers.

The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which had not taken part in the very first combat operations (Operation Neptune) which heralded the start of Operation Overlord on June 06, 1944 (D-Day), did not land until the end of July 1944 in the Omaha Beach region of Normandy.

In their first battles against the German Army, Keystone division, known to the Germans as “Blutiger Eimer” (*Bloody Bucket*) owing to the peculiar shape of the division’s red badge, suffered heavy losses. On August 03, 1944 Wiley’s unit was worn down after several hours of fierce fighting in the bocage country around Saint-Lô. Risking his own life, Captain Wiley managed to gather the company together and, despite having a painful wound to his face, lead them successfully against a German position which he seized. In the first week of August alone, the 110<sup>th</sup> IR lost 20 % of its fighting force in the dreaded hedgerows of the region, which even tanks were unable to penetrate. The GIs called Normandy *hedgerow country*. Ralph Johnson, who, like Wiley, had spent time as a Regiment Adjutant in the 110<sup>th</sup> IR, later described the weeks after the landing simply as a “*holocaust*” – in the original sense of the word meaning *burnt offering* or *large-scale destruction*.

In an engagement on August 09, 1944 most of the officers of G Company, meanwhile under Wiley’s command, were either killed or wounded. Finally, on August 13, 1944, despite having been badly wounded in the leg, while he was personally leading the rest of his company under constant mortar and machine-gun fire across 700 meters of battle field between Saint-Lô and Vire-Normandie against a German position, he was fatally hit by a German sniper.

News of his death was brought to the family two weeks later by the young mother’s father together with the local commander of the American Legion, the local veterans’ association. Captain Robert Calvin Wiley was awarded the Purple Heart, and posthumously, the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest US-American military service medal, as well as the French Croix de Guerre with Gilded Star (*étoile de vermeil*). His body was initially buried at Saint-Lô before being transferred to the US-American National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia not far from Washington, D.C. in

October 1948.

### The remembrance of Wiley comes to – and stays in Neu-Ulm

As already mentioned, the large barracks along Memmingerstraße in Neu-Ulm was named after Captain Wiley in 1953. This circumstance seems to have remained unknown to the family of the deceased for many years. The US Army had obviously never informed them of this (re)naming.

It wasn't until the beginning of 1980, when a friend of the family was transferred to Neu-Ulm, that Margaret Morgan nee Wiley (1923-2020), the youngest sister of Robert Calvin Wiley was informed of the discovery: Through all these years, the Army had indeed honoured and kept the memory of Bob Wiley alive. Luckily at this time, a daughter of Margaret Morgan, Mary Beth Pastorius nee Morgan (born in 1949), was living in Germany. Mary Beth and her husband Thomas Pastorius (1944-2012), a direct descendant of Franz Daniel Pastorius (1651-1719/20), one of the first German settlers in America, lived continuously in Germany from 1974 to 1982 and were very attached to this country. Mary Beth taught domestic science at the American School in Hanau, while her husband, now deceased, built up the international marketing and distribution network of an American IT company.

In June 1980 Margaret Morgan and her husband, accompanied by their three daughters and Tom Pastorius, travelled in Europe and Germany. At the invitation of the senior officer of the Neu-Ulm base, Colonel James W. Eitel (1922-2015) they also visited *Wiley Barracks*. They were amazed to find that the barracks really was named after their brother and uncle. Together with the base administrators, they laid a wreath beneath the information plaque donated by the 110<sup>th</sup> IR.

As we know, the base flag of the USMCA Neu-Ulm was furled on July 26, 1991, ending that era of Neu-Ulm town history and we have long since taken leave from most of our American friends. The name Wiley, however, is a part of the town of Neu-Ulm and will remain so in the future.