

**George Billger**  
**1923 - 2009**  
**Philomena Taddei Billger**  
**b. 1929 - 2010**

**Family History**

I was born November 28, 1923. My mother's name was Elsie Weiss. She lived up in Bucks County somewhere before she married my dad. My father was John W. Billger. I had a brother Cecil, then Francis, myself and Paul. Paul was killed in WWII.

We lived in the farmhouse on Huntingdon Pike and Albidale Drive. It is still there. It is right near the big house, the mansion in Albidale. Our house was moved, believe it or not, so many inches a day, from the meadow to where it is today. We lived in it in the meadow, but not after it was moved. By that time we had moved to a house near the corner of Huntingdon Pike and County Line Road. George Elkins Jr lived on Squirrel Run, the southwest corner of County Line Road and Huntingdon Pike. Now that is all Justa Farm houses.

I was raised on County Line Road, the second house from the corner on the Pike. Back in the woods there was another house. The man who lived there worked at the stable on the farm. The next building down County Line Road was the dairy farm. It had a dairy barn, a two story house and a barn where they raised hogs. There was a little slaughter house there; they made scrapple and sausage. This was all part of the Elkins Farm. When I went to Lower Moreland schools a bus would pick us up. I can't remember the driver's name. Then on Sunday he would pick us up to go to the Presbyterian Church.

I dropped out of school in tenth grade. I went to work on the farm, pitching hay and husking corn for a few years. From there I went into the service. That was 1943. Cecil and Francis went to Lower Moreland and Francis graduated. He was on the football team with Coach Anglemoyer. Mr. Anglemoyer's wife used to teach school too.

**World War II**

In 1943 I was drafted in the Army and shipped to New Cumberland. We got our uniforms and work clothes and then went by train down to Camp Davis in North Carolina. Our orders to be shipped out soon came. We went by train to the Boston area, got on a ship and landed in Scotland. Then we boarded a train to Southampton, England. That was the push-off place for all the troops. We were working in a G-25 Depot, cutting "stuff" up. A Captain came in and I told him, "You better not put that thing down. It will be cut up." He didn't listen. When he came back it was cut up! It was all scrap metal things, jeeps, and things like that. We shipped out of Southampton to Omaha Beach where we unloaded all our equipment.

I was with the Anti-Aircraft Ordinance Department. We would follow Anti-Aircraft Units. We worked ourselves through France, Holland and Germany. The last stop was Hanover, Germany. Those Germans were smart and ingenious. They had an airplane factory right in the middle of the woods.

Then we were somewhere in Belgium. We had orders to take a 40 millimeter weapon, a medium sized weapon for shooting up whatever. By this time our planes were coming out of England and flying over Germany. They were running bombing raids. They were using these anti-aircraft guns for tank weapons. We got a call to go down to the Bulge (the Ardennes) and drop this weapon thing off. I was driving a Jeep. The crew behind me was with an Army truck towing the weapon. We took it into the Bulge, set it up, and went back to Belgium again. In the Bulge there were big, round trees with sticks of dynamite around them. They could blow those trees out with that dynamite. We were in the 353<sup>rd</sup> Maintenance Company AAA.

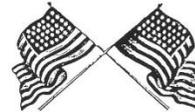
### **The Leopoldville Disaster A Brother's Sacrifice**

My brother, Paul, was in the 66<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the Panther Division, who were the replacements for the Bulge. As it turned out, Paul was on a ship, the Leopoldville. One day we had two or three fellows who were transferred into our company for business reasons. They were telling us about this ship. On Christmas Eve morning of 1944 it was struck by a German sub about five miles off the coast of Cherbourg, France. That's where they unloaded ships. There were two ships together, the Leopoldville and a sister ship, both under contract from the United States. The men didn't know the name of the ship, but they were out on the rescue because the ship was going down.

The men who were in the middle section of the Leopoldville where the German sub struck didn't get out. The men on the upper end, the aft, were better off. There were little ships coming in to rescue, taking the men off. There were life boats, and the men were to get in them. However, the men at the front of the ship started to jump. They were told to hold off on it, but they jumped anyway. The water was cold. Some of the men drowned along with my brother. They weren't told how to put the life jackets on correctly, and they had them on backwards. So when they hit the water the life jacket flipped up and broke their necks. They got his body out of the water, put him on a lifeboat and took him to Cherbourg. Some of the men with Paul came back to life when they were rescued. It was the cold water. Paul didn't come back. He had a broken neck.

#### **We Remember ....**

All those courageous men  
from Lower Moreland Township  
who gave their lives in service to  
our country.



Paul Billger, World War II,  
William L. Gantt, World War II  
Geoffrey L. Ham, Vietnam  
Michael A. Pastorino, Vietnam  
Andrew Pruitt, Training Mission  
Frederick Rhoads, World War II  
David R. Simons, Vietnam  
William Sipler, World War I  
Raymond Somers, World War II  
Calvin Walsh, World War II  
William Warfield, World War II  
George Wright, World War II

I didn't know Paul was on that ship when the men were telling this story. When I was in Holland later, I got notification from Ham Pletcher who was over there too. This whole disaster never really came out in the papers. There were a couple of years in there with Eisenhower and the countries involved, hushing it up. I found out from Ham and a letter from home telling me Paul was killed in an accident and was buried somewhere in France.

A couple years later our ship came into Calais, France. We were sent there to get ready to be sent to Japan. One day we took trucks into Cherbourg to pick up tires to put on our vehicles. On the way into the town we got to one of the GI cemeteries. I said to my buddies, "You know, I got a brother buried somewhere in France. I don't know where." It just happened then that our truck broke down in front of the cemetery. I went into the cemetery office and they told me he was buried there and took me to his grave. There were rows of crosses. Paul was there.

After that the war ended in August, 1945. All the guys had points to get out of the service, but I didn't have enough. I spent almost a year with another company and then was transferred down from Calais to Marseille, France. I was shipped to a gas depot, a Delabase Headquarters. Every morning about four or five o'clock I'd take the tanker to the docks to get gas and bring it back. In the meantime I met PW's from the German army. I felt sorry for them. They were Americans who went over to Germany with their parents, and they got stuck there and had to go in the German army, even though they were Americans. I guess their parents had business over there. We had nice conversations with them.

Right after that I got orders to go to Le Havre, France. Then I got on a Liberty Ship, built by a relative of Levitt, (Levittown), from Huntingdon Valley. I got home all right, into Fort Dix, and then I was discharged.

Paul's body was shipped to the United States. If we left him there he would have been buried in a National Cemetery over there. This would be in 1948. He came back with an escort. Now he's interred in Sunset Memorial Park.

### **A Return to Civilian Life**

When I got out of the service, I bought a 4 door dark blue Dodge. I was just out riding one day, and I was over Byberry Road and going down York Road by the Old Mill area in Hatboro. There she was, standing on that corner. Philomena was waiting for the bus. I offered her a ride but she wouldn't get in my car at first. She took me the long way that the bus would go to get to her house. That was in 1946.

### **Philomena Taddei Family History**

I didn't graduate from Lower Moreland. I left in eleventh grade. We lived on the Pitcairn estate on Terwood Road. Mary Beshea Taddei was my mother. I was born in a little house on Terwood and Creek Roads. It has been torn down. It was on the left hand side on Creek Road. My family worked for the Pitcairns. Then we moved up on Terwood Road in a house that sat up on the meadow. This has also been torn down. My father was a caretaker. Up on the hill was a big house with five bedrooms. This was unheard of at that time. Then we moved to North Hills in a third floor apartment, then back to Huntingdon Valley to my mother's house. I was one of eleven children. We all are pretty much still in this area.

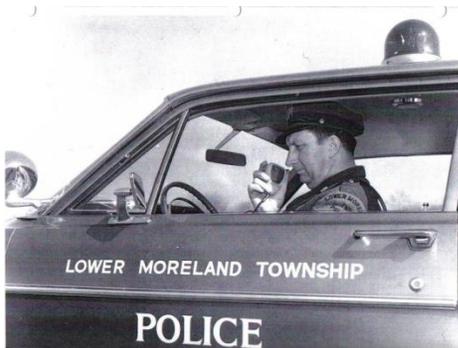
## My Marriage to George

I married George in June, 1947. Met him on that corner in Hatboro in 1946 in June. The first house we lived in was with my mother. Then we moved to his mother's house on County Line Road. I would walk up to County Line to the Pike to catch the bus to the Bethayres Train Station to catch the train to Jenkintown. I worked at Strawbridge & Clothier on York Road.

One day I was walking up County Line Road to catch the bus and Chief Russell Pletcher stopped. He offered me a ride to the train. I said, "No thank you." I think he wanted to feel me out about the possibility of George coming to work on the police force. Before that George worked for Standard Pressed Steel and Diston Saw.

After living on County Line Road, we moved into an apartment which Leopold owned, where Mom's Luncheonette was, in an apartment upstairs. This was where the current Bethayres Shopping Center is now. There was a cleaners and a hardware store all across the street from the Ford place. From there we moved to Red Lion Road, a double house owned by Lentz. This was next to Bill Smith, below the Methodist Church. We tried to buy that house, but they wouldn't sell it. This was near the Pastore's. They were friends of my father who also came from Italy. My father was Italian and my mother was French. The Italians were hard workers. My father was never without a job. Then we moved to Kathy Lane in 1953. We paid \$13,000 for that house. In 1983 we sold it for \$65,000 (In September, 2005 a house in that neighborhood sold for \$345,000). Our two children were born during this time. Linda was born in 1950 and George in 1953.

Before George joined the Lower Moreland Police, there was a special police force that worked down on Terwood Road, but he never worked officially there. On their records they said he was on private duty in that area, but he never really worked there. George Flack was the original policeman in the district. Russell Pletcher was on guard duty up at the Elkin's mansion before he became Chief. George started on the force in 1948.



[Photo: George on duty]

How did George get the job on the police force? Chief Pletcher used to stand at the Huntingdon Valley Bank at the corner of Huntingdon Pike & Fettersmill Road, on Friday nights. He took his duty guarding the bank. George used to go down and stand there and talk to him. That's how the job came about.

**Patrolman George Billger  
To  
Sergeant George Billger**

I have a police story about how the communications were back when I started. When I started on the force the department used radio communications with the Abington Police Department. A call would go to Abington first, and then they would radio back to us. Sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't work. So when it didn't work, Russ would put the light on in the front of his house on Murray Avenue to let us know that there was a call waiting. So I thought I might as well sit out in front of his house to see if a call would come in!



[Photo: George and a primitive version of a patrol car]

George Ewing was the next person to join the force. George Flack came back onto the force when Russ Pletcher was Chief. George Flack always worked for the Budd Plant even when he was Chief. He worked there with Frank Burkhart.

**Elkins Farm**

In 1937, photographs of all the employees of the Elkins Farm operation were taken. They included John Miller, the boss of the farm (in the middle), the two chauffeurs, my father, John W. Billger, who worked with the horses, the butler, and the man who drove the tractors.

**The Elkin's**

When the father died, George Jr. moved over into the big mansion in Justa Farm, which is now in the Albidale Farm area. George W. Elkins built that mansion himself. The mansion has over 40 rooms. Elkins came up from Elkins Park. There was a Tyler involved also. Those two families are connected somehow. Tyler Park in Newtown was named after that family.



[Photo: Elkins Estate home; OYRHS]

The stone cottages were for the workers. When you go up that driveway, the first building was the garage when Elkin's had all his cars. Then there are three fieldstone houses on the right. The first two houses had the chauffeurs and housekeepers. Ed Lenon lived in one. The third house had an Italian fellow, Pelopoly, who was in charge of all the gardens and greenhouses. My wife's father, Ralph Taddei, worked with the gardener. There was a row of garages up at the end. John Miller had a house on the left hand side.

When George Elkin's oldest daughter, Stella, got married her father built houses back on Buck Road for her, her sister, Nancy and the son, George Jr. Stella lived back in the woods. The house had a lake out front. In back of her house was a stable. Nancy lived up on the left hand side just above the woods on Buck Road. George Jr. lived out on Huntingdon Pike across from the DLB house. That's now part of Justa Farm.

On the southeast corner of Huntingdon Pike and County Line Road there was a barn where they raised steer. There was a big double house. When you came south on the Pike there was another big double house. Two Black men lived there. Up by the stone cottages was a place where they kept hay. There was a three story garage type building that was a dormitory for some of the workers. There was another house where the horse trainer lived. Another long building there was where the horses were. My father worked there. It had an indoor track with stables in the middle.

Outside there was a driveway that went down to the big race track with a lake in the middle. Every year about October they would have the flat races. It was a benefit for the June Fete. All this was on the Elkins property. That is where the June Fete started.



[Photo: One of the races held on October 7, 1939 as part of the 29<sup>th</sup> Race Meeting of the Huntingdon Valley Hunt; OYRHS]