

# Father Ignatius Maternowski

## Captain 508<sup>th</sup> PIR, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division

### Killed here 6 June 1944

**Gueutteville hamlet** is located 2 km northeast of Picaucville. In 1944, around 80 people lived here. Like today, it was made up of a principal road bordered by houses and some agricultural fields. The only commercial business was the combined café-grocery owned by the Jules Thouroude family. The upper part of the hamlet is situated west towards the village of Picaucville and the lower part east towards Caponnet, where "Hill 30" is now found.

In April 1944, a German company of the 1057<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 91<sup>st</sup> Division occupied this hamlet. German soldiers composed this unit along with Georgians and Mongols, who were dressed in German uniforms. On their sleeves they wore insignias of their own respective countries. This company did not have much in the way of transportation. Principally, they used horse-driven carts. The German Command Post was located on a large farm in the upper part of the hamlet, known as the Bernaville Castle. See the photo "*partie haute*". The German officers and enlisted men lived in the homes of the local people that they requisitioned.

During the night 5-6 June 1944, a large number of U.S. paratroopers touched down here. They were of the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. Their intended DZ "N" was actually north of Picaucville. A glider crashed near, outside of its intended landing zone "E".

In the middle of the night, U.S. soldiers knocked on the door of the Thouroude family home café-grocery, attempting to get their bearings, so they could move toward their objectives. U.S. medics brought wounded or dead paratroopers and glider men into Thouroude's café-grocery. The residence and small business quickly became a first aid station. U.S. soldiers placed ammunition crates and three long-distance radio sets in the café-grocery. Among these U.S. soldiers was a Catholic Chaplain of the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR, Captain Ignatius P. Maternowski. \*

In addition to religious insignias that he wore on his jacket collar, Maternowski wore a Red Cross armband on his left sleeve, same as doctors, nurses, and U.S. Army Medics. Realising Thouroude's café-grocery would soon run out of space due to the continual flow of arriving wounded, Maternowski searched to find a suitable structure to shelter the wounded. He was walking alone with a bare head, wearing his helmet on his belt, in the lower sector of the hamlet. That morning Maternowski insisted upon meeting the German Medic in charge in hopes to combine their wounded together. Mr. Jules Thouroude tried to discourage him, but in vain! Maternowski realized that his plan was risky. He left his case, containing various religious ceremonial items, in the custody of Thouroude.

Walking briskly and with determination, Maternowski went to meet his German counterpart. To the surprise of the people of Gueutteville, Maternowski returned to the café-grocery accompanied by the German Major, so that he could see for himself the plight of the wounded U.S. soldiers. The German Major certainly would have made note of the stockpile of munitions and radio equipment in the café-grocery. After this quick visit, one can suppose that Maternowski, full of humanity and compassion, escorted the German Major back to the upper part of the hamlet. Upon his return, about midway through the hamlet, a gun shot sounded at his back, reportedly fired from one of the houses. Maternowski fell to the ground with his head laying on the edge of the ditch. He was killed by a bullet shot anonymously. Curiously, the Germans forbade anyone to remove his body. Maternowski's body lay for three days where he had been shot .... just to the left of this information panel.

On 9 June U.S. soldiers of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, arriving from Utah Beach, found and recovered Maternowski's body. At the beginning of the afternoon on 6 June, the Germans began an attack on the U.S. paratroopers beginning at the upper part of the hamlet, and also, attacking from the east, along the road to Carponnet. A German-manned tank halted in front of the café-grocery and fired. Its blasts caused the roof and walls to collapse on the medics and the wounded. It was 24 hours later that the Germans authorized the village residents to remove the wounded and carry them in carts to the mill Ebecquigneul. The wounded joined the captured paratroopers who were locked in the stables. Many of the wounded and dying were stuck under the ruins of the café-grocery and could not be saved.

The U.S. military morning report dated 26 June 1944 notes that Captain Ignatius P. Maternowski (Chaplain) 0-480972 was missing in action as of 6 June 1944. However, the morning report transmitted 29 June 1944 to the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR Headquarters stated that he was killed in action 13 June 1944. (Note : Often, if the actual date of death was unknown to the U.S. Graves Registration units, they typically recorded the date they recovered a body. Hence 13 June 44 reflects when the body was removed to a local cemetery, and the apparent confusion of the date of his death. This is not uncommon.) The residents of Gueutteville hamlet are certain that Maternowski was killed on the early morning 6 June 1944. Therefore, this story is based primarily upon testimony of the residents of Gueutteville. This account has been cross-referenced and thoroughly researched. Some of the eye witnesses to the killing of Maternowski still live in Gueutteville.