



QUEENS COLLEGE

# History Alumni News

Volume 1, No. 1 Winter 1999

## A Letter from the Chair

Dear Alumni,

Last spring when I sent out a letter announcing that the History Department was planning an alumni newsletter, I had hopes that it would be ready to go out before the end of 1998. My timetable was off by a few months, but here we are.

This first effort has, I am sure, many imperfections, but it is a start. First, I would like to thank Gerry Fetner, Claire Friedlander, William Mongello, and George Williams. One of the ideas that emerged from my discussion with them was this newsletter. Second, I want to thank Edward Bayone for his extremely generous contribution to the department earmarked for the expenses involved in starting a newsletter.

I have tried to be responsive to a number of suggestions that came in following my announcement. There were requests for more information about the history faculty and for a complete listing of their publications. Since we are perhaps the most prolific publishing department on campus, it is not possible to provide such a list. What you will find is a roster of our faculty, noting their specialties and some of their important books.

Another writer expressed interest in receiving news of other alumni. If those who wish to share news of themselves e-mail the news to Claire Friedlander (cdfriedlan@aol.com), we will try to include this in the next newsletter.

I was delighted to receive a number of letters from former students in response to the newsletter announcement, as were other faculty members. You should be aware of how important it is for professors to hear that their efforts in awakening an interest in and appreciation of history have not been forgotten.

Besides the faculty roster, what will you find in this newsletter? First, there are two short remembrances of professors who touched the lives of many students. One is of Professor Richard Emery by Professor John Maxwell O'Brien, a Queens alumnus and present member of the department. John, like Dick Emery, has for a long time been one of the College's outstanding teachers. The other remembrance is of Professor Solomon Lutnick by William Mongello, Class of 1970. I know many of you will remember Sol's infectious enthusiasm and good humor; perhaps some of you took one of his European trips.

Second, we have two profiles written by Tara Helfman, one of our outstanding students. Tara is a senior who recently won one of the very prestigious Marshall Scholarships to pursue a PhD in history at Cambridge University. As a foreword to the profiles, I have included an excerpt from a self-description by Tara. The statement speaks eloquently of why the study of history is so important. The two profiles are of Arnold Franco, an alumnus, and Professor

Marion Kaplan. Tara interviewed them and wrote their mini-histories. Arnold Franco has been a generous contributor to the college and to the department. Recently he published the history of his World War II intelligence unit, *Code to Victory*. Professor Kaplan's most recent book, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, has won critical acclaim and recently was chosen as one of *The New York Times*' most notable books of 1998.

Third, I have included a brief story on Professor Jack Hexter from the 1942 Queens College yearbook. It was sent to me by Robert Smuts of the Class of 1942 as part of a reminder that my original announcement had left out any reference to the distinguished historians who had been members of the department in its earliest days—people like Jack Hexter, Koppell Pinson, Gaudens Megaro, and Henry David. I thought the story was of historical interest, particularly given the prominence Professor Hexter achieved in the historical profession.

Frank Warren, Chair

### TAKE NOTE

- Distinguished Professor Paul Avrich retired this January. A brilliant teacher and scholar (the world's leading authority on anarchism), Paul will be missed by his colleagues and students.
- The History Department is now on the web. Go to [www.qc.edu](http://www.qc.edu), click By Departments under Academic Departments, and then click on History. Check us out and let us know what you think. It's a start — like this newsletter.
- On Alumni Day, May 1, the History Department will have an Open House from 3-5 pm in Powdermaker Hall 200. Please come by.

- A QC yearbook which may interest you: *The '98 Silhouette*, a unique 60th Anniversary edition. The 320-page volume includes a photo history of the College from when it was a parental home for boys to its magnificent campus today.

The yearbook features campus buildings and the people for whom they were named, "60 Years of People," sports highlights, QC Presidents from Paul Klapper to Allen Sessoms, and many other interesting articles about the College. The price is only \$40 for this keepsake edition. Send a check made out to "QC Association" to Joe Brostek, Special Events, or call (718) 997-3600 for more information.

Save the Date: Alumni Day • May 1, 1999 • Powdermaker Hall

**Isaac Alteras** is a specialist in the history of Israel and in post-World War II foreign policy. He is the author of *Eisenhower and Israel: US-Israeli Relations, 1953-1960*.

Distinguished Professor **Paul Avrich** is a specialist in Russian history and the leading authority on American and European anarchism. Among his many books are *Sacco and Vanzetti*, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, and *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*.

**Philip Cannistraro** is Distinguished Professor of Italian and Italian-American history. His most recent book is *Il Duce's Other Woman: The Untold Story of Margherita Sarfatti*.

**Elisheva Carlebach** is a specialist in Jewish history. She is the author of *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*.

**Ralph Della Cava**, a Latin American specialist, is the author of *Miracle at Joazeiro*. Recently he has been studying religious developments in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

**Elena Frangakis-Syrett** is a specialist in 18th- and 19th-century European history, with an emphasis on southeastern Europe. She is the author of *The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1820*.

**Joshua Freeman** is a specialist in American Labor history. He is the author of *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966*, and recently edited a

collection of essays, *Audacious Democracy: Labor, Intellectuals, and the Social Renewal of America*.

**Jay Gordon** is a specialist in modern European history.

**Vivian Gruder** specializes in the French Revolution. She is the author of *The Royal Provincial Intendants: A Governing Elite in Eighteenth-Century France*.

**Leo Hershkowitz** specializes in American Colonial history and New York City and New York State history. He is the author of *Tweed's New York: Another Look*.

**Stanley Hirshson** is a specialist in the Civil War. Among his publications are *The White Tecumseh: A Biography of General William T. Sherman*, and *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877 to 1893*.

**Marion Kaplan** specializes in European women's history, with a particular emphasis on the history of German Jewish women. Among her many publications are *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany*, and *The Marriage Bargain: Women and Dowries in European History*.

**Jay Kinsbruner** is a specialist in Latin American history. Among his numerous publications are *Independence in Spanish America: Civil Wars, Revolutions, and Underdevelopment*, *Petty Capitalism in Spanish America:*

*The Puylos of Puebla, Mexico City, Caracas, and Buenos Aires*, and *Chile: A Historical Interpretation*.

**Benny Kraut** is a specialist in Jewish history and Director of Jewish Studies. He is the author of *German Jewish Orthodoxy in an Immigrant Synagogue: New Hope Congregation and the Ambiguities of Ethnic Religion* and *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler*.

**Edgar McManus** specializes in United States constitutional history. He is the author of *Law and Liberty in Early New England* and *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*.

**Frank Merli** is a specialist in United States foreign policy and the graduate adviser to the MA program. He is the author of *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, 1861-1865*.

**Premilla Nadasen** specializes in African-American and African history. She has completed a PhD dissertation on the "Welfare Rights Movement."

**John O'Brien** specializes in Ancient and Medieval history. He is the author of *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy*.

**Jon Peterson** specializes in urban and immigrant history. He is completing a major book on the history of urban planning in the United States.

**Martin Pine** is a specialist in the history of the Renaissance. He is the author of *Pietro Pomponazzi*.

**Stuart Prall** is a specialist in British history. Among his publications

are *Church and State in Tudor and Stuart England* and *The Bloodless Revolution: England, 1688*.

**Mark Rosenblum** specializes in Palestinian-Israeli relations. He is the director of the Michael Harrington Center, and has written articles on the mideast peace process.

**Morris Rossabi** specializes in Chinese history. He is the author of *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* and *China and Inner Asia from 1368 to the Present Day*.

**Donald Scott** is a specialist in pre-Civil War American cultural history. He is the author of *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850*. He is also the Dean of the Social Sciences Division.

**David Syrett** is a specialist in the naval history of both the American Revolution and World War II. His most recent book is *The Royal Navy in European Waters during the American Revolutionary War*. Among his many earlier publications are *The Defeat of the German U-Boats: The Battle of the Atlantic*, *The Royal Navy in American Waters, 1775-1783*, and *Shipping and the Seven Years War, 1756-62*.

**Jyotsna Uppal** is a specialist in South Asian history. She has completed a doctoral dissertation on the Arya Samaj, a late-19th-century Indian reform movement.

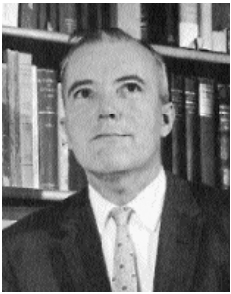
**Frank Warren**, a specialist in the New Deal, chairs the History Department. He is the author of *An Alternative Vision: The*

*Social Party in the 1930's and Liberals and Communism: The 'Red Decade' Revisited.* His new book *Noble Abstractions: American Liberal Intellectuals and World War II* will be published this spring.

**Zvi Yavetz** is a Distinguished Professor of Ancient history. Among his many books are *Tiberius and Caligula*, *The Limits of Charisma*, *Cesar et son image*, and *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Rome*.

### John Maxwell O'Brien Remembers . . . Richard Wilder Emery (1912-1989)

I shall never forget walking into Professor Emery's classroom over forty years ago. I was a Queens College sophomore and the class was a survey in Medieval history. I had



been told by older students that a class with Emery was a must at the College and I succumbed to their advice. To be quite frank, however, I was an

English major at the time and didn't anticipate getting all that much out of the class. Nevertheless, I followed their recommendation and to my utter astonishment sat in Emery's classroom captivated by this towering man who stood there and spoke about his arcane subject with such effortless eloquence. He was someone worth listening to.

And listen I did. Professor Emery was trained as a medievalist but during the fifties at Queens College he taught "everything," as he described it, "from the amoeba to the Council of Trent." I sat in four of Emery's courses taking copious notes and marveling at someone who could hold forth on subject matter ranging over 4,500 years with authority and enthusiasm. He would customarily arrive in class with nothing but a rollbook, grasp a piece of chalk (which was always there in those days), list the topic under

consideration on the blackboard, and subsume under it a lengthy list of people, places and things. That list served as an outline of the lecture of the day and Emery expounded on each and every item in order—*without a single note!* His lectures were orchestrated in masterful fashion and the class sat spellbound as Emery carried on.

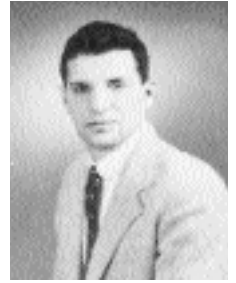
I entered Emery's classroom an English major but by the end of that term I had defected to history. I went on to get a PhD in history because of Emery. I wrote articles and books about Jews, heretics, and the Inquisition because of Emery. In fact, my biography of Alexander the Great (which yielded my fifteen minutes of fame) can be traced back to a comment about Alexander made by Emery in his undergraduate class on the ancient world. He had planted the seed.

When I walk into the classroom as a teacher today I bring Emery with me. That is to say, I shamelessly employ every technique of his that I can remember. Emery never spelled it out for me, but by his example he demonstrated that good teaching required substance, humor, rhythm, and orchestration.

Some time ago I received recognition for my own efforts in that direction and was asked to share my thoughts on the subject. Of course I mentioned Emery in passing, but I went on to spend the lion's share of the time delivering what I thought were memorable ideas on the learning process. After I had finished, three members of the Queens College community rushed up to me and I expected to be congratulated on my profound insights. It turned out to be an impromptu chorus anxious to tell me that they too had had Emery for a teacher and that he was the greatest. They were right.

### Bill Mongello '70 Remembers . . . Solomon Lutnick (1928-1979)

It was a cold winter, the beginning of the spring 1967 semester. Not having enough credits to register with the upper sophomores, I registered late. While not being an officially declared major in history, I was required to take certain courses, and I decided to try one of the American History courses, History 8 or 9. I rambled through my registration booklet and chose History 8, which covered the pre-colonial period through the early 19th century. The class was scheduled for the "Dome," and I recall my excitement about it being my first class there.



As a required survey course, there must have been 100 students in the class. After much noise and confusion a rather young looking individual attempted to obtain order. I thought he was a graduate student at first, but not long after order was accomplished he introduced himself as Dr. Sol Lutnick. His voice had a slight stammer, as he often would preface a statement with several "uhs." The first thing he said was, "If you are not registered for History 8, please leave, I need to make this class smaller." Very few left and this class had all the characteristics of a management problem from the start.

However, Sol handled the class well, he kept us on our toes, asking questions and even calling on people for answers. He kept us laughing, always interspersing a few good jokes, and was able to creatively digress without losing the topic. He was very skillful at this, and in my 28 years of teaching I have used this strategy on many occasions. Sol had an amiable way about him, yet he had high standards and expected much from his students. Always with an engaging smile and a clever quip, Sol was no pushover. You eventually learned that you shouldn't let him lull you



into thinking his class was all laughs. Sol Lutnick was able to create a comfortable learning environment and maintain academic standards. He was firm, yet fair, and was always approachable, except at the beginning of the baseball season, as he was a rabid Mets fan. I think back to the many influences that fostered my current style of teaching, and I can proudly say that Sol was one of the most prominent.

During the fall of 1971 I took a graduate historiography course with Sol. There were no more than eight students at the start, and by the end of the semester there were only four. Again, his intensity and high standards were couched by a convivial lecture and a jocular manner. We were graduate students, and we knew what was expected of us. All I remember was: Turner, Beard, and Parrington, and most important Sol's definitive statement on class distinction in America, "When a non-American sees a Cadillac rounding a corner he or she would say, Die capitalist pig." But an American experiencing the same sight would say, "Mine will be blue."

Sol Lutnick is missed, he left us much too soon. I'm sure he left his mark on others too. I will always remember his amiable style along with his capacity to motivate, enlighten, and teach. In a real sense he became an influence on my professional career as a teacher.

### Profiles Foreword by Tara Helfman

While other children my age were idolizing caped crusaders with x-ray vision and superhuman strength, I found all the heroism I needed in a slightly balding, bespectacled Englishman. His name was James Burke and he hosted the BBC documentary series "Connections." Resplendent in his brown-and-cream leisure suit, he led my five-year-old imagination through the twisting circuits of history, showing how two innovations, though separated by many miles and millennia,

were not only causally connected, but causally dependent upon one another. I was living in Israel at the time, transferred there by my father's business.

Thanks to Mr. Burke, I was able to feel connected with the culture in which I was living, a culture in which the past was very much a part of the present. Those were the days of the *Intifada*, and I was growing increasingly aware that the bomb blasts and gunshots we sometimes heard were rooted in a problem more profound than I could understand at the time, and in a history which had formed the very identities of the people around me. When my father passed away the next year, we returned to the United States to start a new life in spite of the 44 many difficulties, both personal and financial, which would lie ahead. As my family constantly moved from place to place, my one constant remained my love of learning.

I began my studies at Queens College intent on studying English. Although history had always fascinated me, Donne's rapture and Keats's imagery enthralled me. But then I got my History 101 midterm back from Professor Elena Frangakis-Syrett with the words, "Are you a history major? *See me!*" emblazoned on the back in blood-red letters. We met and talked; she recommended that I read Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*. I devoured it.

Thus began the process of integrating my passion for literature and philosophy with my love of history. How they all interact became increasingly clear to me. Just as history shapes the development of thought, thought in turn catalyzes change, setting into motion forces resulting in historical progress. I can fall into Swift or Montesquieu, Locke or Paine, and find in their writings the resonance of contemporary politics, society, and even scandal. They speak cogently across centuries to issues that have no temporal bounds.

I have been fortunate enough to study abroad in Cambridge and Siena, where I found the historical

and literary traditions I had previously experienced only through books alive and well in the very stones of the city walls, those walls which had borne witness to plagues and sieges, civil wars and Renaissance. Knowledge of history adds another dimension to the manner in which I perceive the world around me. I can look, for example, at the stone walls of Siena, and see not only their coarse golden surfaces, but also their rich, turbulent past. History has become a means by which I can understand things almost from the inside out.

### MARION KAPLAN

"Honestly, Tara," my friend said as a smile spread across her face, "Professor Kaplan is one of the best professors I've ever had." In fact, that seems to be the consensus among those students with whom I have spoken about Professor Marion Kaplan. From her engaging and enthusiastic classroom style to the guidance and encouragement she offers on an individual basis, Professor Kaplan garners glowing praise from history majors and non-majors alike. Regardless of whether it is a European history survey course or a colloquium on Germany and the Jews, students praise her insights, her tremendous expertise, and, most of all, as my friend remarked, the manner in which the subject matter "just comes to life" in her hands.

When Professor Kaplan was an undergraduate at Douglass College of Rutgers University, she pursued a double major in two of her favorite subjects, history and German literature. Having come from a German-Jewish family herself (both her parents fled Nazi Germany to the United States), Professor Kaplan was able to explore German culture through the two disciplines. As a graduate student, however, she chose to focus on history because although her interest in the two disciplines was easily reconciled, the questions each area of study prompted were not. History allowed her to explore complex questions to which literature nei-

ther gave rise nor provided the keys to answering: namely, how so brutal and evil a movement as Nazism could be born of a civilized country like Germany.

Equally important in her intellectual development was the climate in which she pursued her graduate studies, which began at Columbia in 1968. There she was influenced by the women's movement and by students who were beginning to explore women's history. As a result, Professor Kaplan gravitated toward two fields of study: German history and women's history.

One of her first endeavors was *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany*, an organizational history of the women's movement in Germany from 1904 to 1938 viewed from a grass-roots perspective. She then went on to write *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany*, a work which won the National Jewish Book Award and the German History Prize of the American Historical Association. Professor Kaplan states that through this research she "backed into" writing her most recent publication, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, a work focusing on the daily experiences of 555 German Jews as institutionalized policies of anti-Semitism came to pervade society. Using primarily, but not exclusively, women's experiences and perceptions, Professor Kaplan presents a microcosm of the struggles of the German Jewish population at large. Women conventionally stood at the center of family life and thus shared in the experiences of all the family members; their experiences demonstrate the degree to which gender played a role in the formulation of policies towards Jews and of Jewish responses to the ever-growing Nazi threat.

In researching this book, Professor Kaplan drew not only upon articles and monographs, but also on letters, diaries, and interviews with German Jews. However, her most important

source by far was memoirs, some of which she was able to view at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York and others at Harvard University and Yad Vashem in Israel. In 1939 Harvard sponsored a writing contest centered on the topic "My Life in Germany Before and After 1933." The university then built an archive of memoirs from the contest entries. Through these unique accounts, rich in vivid details of everyday life which had yet to be paled by the gas chambers, Professor Kaplan was able to reconstruct a painfully vivid account of the daily struggles Germany's Jews faced. The result is a book that Deborah Lipstadt, writing for *The New York Times*, called "devastatingly powerful." It is terrifyingly easy, through the intimacy of Professor Kaplan's accounts, to begin contextualizing the experiences of German Jews into one's own daily life or to become attached to particular women who appear often in the book. One feels compelled to read their stories because they seem so very similar to people one might know.

Professor Kaplan knew that this book would take a harder toll on her emotionally than any other work she had written. She credits her family with helping to save her, providing the distractions, support, and even the comic relief she needed as her research grew increasingly intense. As an historian, she managed to maintain a critical distance from the subject matter, hard as it may have been at times. As a teacher, she understands the responses a subject like this can provoke in students, and therefore does not try to be dispassionate about it. She admits that while most historians would say they are trying to be objective in a situation such as this, she tries to give students both a context of German responses and Jewish responses as a means of impressing upon them the nature of life in Nazi Germany. She tries to help students understand both the underlying motives of Nazism and what Peter Gay called "the pockets of decency"—those people who

rose above brutality and worked to help Jews in peril.

Professor Kaplan's next project will be an analysis of German responses to having perpetrated or borne witness to acts of cruelty. It is an analysis that Professor Kaplan feels is critical to understanding the nature of racism at large. This is a message she brings to her students with force and clarity, and serves as just one reason why many of her students respond to her classes with resounding praise.

### ARNOLD FRANCO

"My family is what we call reconnaissance," Arnold Franco told me as I was wrapping up our interview. "We remember. I've never forgotten what Queens College has given me."

Arnold Franco graduated from Queens College in June 1943. Since then he has been an active member of the college community and a generous patron of college programs. As a decorated member of a WWII army intelligence unit, he helped save lives by breaking German codes; as a businessman, he founded the insurance company Franco and Son; now he has returned to the study of history, his major in college, and one of his greatest interests. This time, however, he is approaching an aspect of history of which he was very much a part: the history of his army intelligence unit.

Born and raised in Queens, Mr. Franco began his college studies at the University of Michigan upon his graduation from Richmond Hill High School in 1940. During his first semester there, an epidemic of strep throat struck the campus, leaving ten students dead for lack of adequate medicine. Mr. Franco, taken ill and running a fever of 106 degrees, was brought home by his parents for the summer to recuperate. That summer he decided that he would transfer into Queens College.

With a student body of 800-1000, Mr. Franco found QC to be a far cry from the sometimes impersonal

nature of life at a big university. Queens College “was like a club,” he explained. “Everyone knew everybody else. If you saw a familiar face on campus you’d nod. There was a real feeling that we were part of a small, select, almost elitist school to the extent that everyone there had been carefully chosen. You had to pass an exam and have at least an 85 average [to gain admission] — not so tremendous today — but it was a culling of the top grade students.” He found the intellectual environment at Queens to be top grade as well.

Whereas at the University of Michigan his freshman classes sometimes contained 400-500 students and professors often left the actual teaching up to graduate students, the learning process at Queens College “was much more hands-on. You’d see your professors on campus and there was much more camaraderie.” Although Mr. Franco had no trouble adjusting to the academic demands of the University of Michigan, he had a difficult time adjusting to the social life there; he was only sixteen years old when he started college. But the small classes and close community that a school like Queens College offered at the time enabled Mr. Franco to enjoy himself as much socially as academically because, on both counts, “QC lacked for nothing.”

When the United States entered WWII, appeals were made to students by the armed forces, offering them the opportunity to enlist in the army and defer entrance until graduation. Mr. Franco and his friends, out of a sense of duty, gladly enlisted. However, soon after he signed up in 1942, Mr. Franco realized that the army was not going to be able to live up to its commitment because it needed manpower immediately. He proceeded to cram as many courses into his schedule as he could in an effort to finish college before being called to duty. During the fall 1942 semester Mr. Franco took on a course load of thirty-two credits in addition to working at night as a stock boy for Macy’s. His parents

accepted his diploma in his absence in June 1943; by then he was already engaged in military service.

Though Mr. Franco was trained for an infantry unit, it was not long before he found himself in training for intelligence operations. “When you’re in the army,” he explained, “you realize very soon that you have no power and things carry you along purely by happenstance.” While Mr. Franco was training with the bayonet, an officer noticed that he was particularly skilled at using that weapon (Mr. Franco credits his years on the Richmond Hill High School fencing team for that). Somehow, the powers that be found out that Mr. Franco was fluent in Spanish, a product of his Sephardic background. Rather than being sent overseas, he was held on at the training camp in order to train a battalion of soldiers from Puerto Rico in the use of the bayonet.

After several weeks of this, Mr. Franco was given new orders: he was to report to a language assignment center at the University of Auburn. Upon his arrival, he lined up to receive his assignment. The two men directly before him were assigned to Queens College, so Mr. Franco immediately assumed that he would be sent there as well. “You can imagine my disappointment when I got assigned to Michigan State College!” he groaned.

When his group arrived in Lansing, the general in charge of the program gruffly told the men, “All you fellas came here qualified in a language. If you really are qualified, pick another one.” Mr. Franco chose German, and for eight hours a day, starting in the summer of 1943 and ending that Christmas, he was immersed in German language, culture, geography, and history. After completing his oral and written exams, he was sent home on leave; he was not there for two days before he was summoned back to Michigan and then sent on to Virginia with ten classmates from the language school. According to Mr. Franco,

their destination “was a very secretive place. We got there at night and saw these big antennae sticking up. It was a code-breaking school. After the war it became the beginnings of the headquarters of the CIA.” He trained there in code-breaking from January to April 1944.

One day, while he and his ten companions were walking down the hall, a sergeant passing by told them out of the corner of his mouth that they would be leaving for London the next day by airplane. “Now that was a shock,” Mr. Franco remarked. “In those days you didn’t fly. Troops went by ship to Europe, burrowed in cabins like sardines. We were excited.” After a quick physical exam (and an excruciating dental exam), the men boarded their plane full of generals and colonels; they were sent to the back so as to remain inconspicuous. After passing through Labrador, Newfoundland, and Iceland, the men landed in Scotland and traveled the last leg of their journey to London.

It was there that Mr. Franco learned what lay ahead: he and his companions were to be assigned to a mobile intelligence unit. “It was something new,” he explained, “something the British developed, actually, and we copied it. The British found out in Egypt that they needed intelligence moving along with the army, so you’d have guys sitting in trucks with headphones on intercepting German radio messages. I was given the specialty of breaking the actual code messages. Other guys would actually listen to Germans talking to each other—German pilots talking to the bases. Sometimes we’d pick up German tanks, you know, but the frequencies we were usually listening to were German air force.” The entire unit was split into three detachments, A, B, and C. While moving through Normandy, each detachment would leapfrog over the other in order to advance; this ensured that while any one detachment was moving, there would always be another group hard at work. Each

detachment was then assigned to an army which it was to follow.

One of Mr. Franco's main responsibilities was to intercept messages sent from a German weather reconnaissance plane called Westa Eins (Wetter Staffel Eins) situated in Norway. At 12:30 am, the plane would begin its circuit within the Arctic circle and report to Germany the weather conditions for all of Europe. It was imperative that these messages be broken as soon as possible because the codes used in each day's weather message would be used as the day's code by the entire German air force. His work made breaking the daily codes "a snap."

However, Mr. Franco and the other members of his unit rarely knew how the information they received by breaking codes was used. That is why the unit was startled when one day they were told that their commander-general was on his way to pay them a visit in their caravan. They had earlier broken a code message sent from the south of France to Germany requesting ten or twelve airplanes with which to evacuate general staff members back to Germany. As with most of its intercepted messages, Mr. Franco's unit simply passed the information on and resumed its work. When their commander-general entered the caravan and informed the men that the group of planes, complete with the general staff of the German 19th army aboard, had been shot down thanks to their work, the entire unit was thrilled. Mr. Franco also noted that "our officers were very happy because all of a sudden all the equipment we had been putting in requests for was coming in" within a week.

The secretive nature of Mr. Franco's unit during the war resulted in his not being able to find out until very recently the consequences of much of the work he had done. It was not until the National Security Administration declassified information regarding the unit in 1996 that he learned the sometimes tragic side of his job. Two or three days before

one of the bloodiest battles of WWII, Mr. Franco intercepted a message sent by German pilots to their own anti-aircraft. It read, "We're sending over 105 aircraft" and then proceeded to break that number down into 90 J-U 52s (transport planes) and 15 J-U 88s (converted bombers). The message also gave the time, place, and date of the mission. Mr. Franco was shocked to hear the Germans talking about mobilizing such a large movement at night. Just as he began to second guess whether he had heard the message correctly, it was repeated again. According to Mr. Franco, "it was an unbelievable gift to confirm what we got, so we called air force HQ, sent back our reports, and asked them to acknowledge. Two days later they had already gotten the message but nothing was done. Now, this report in 1996 was a survey of why we weren't prepared. It said they had received messages from detachment A and other sources, but by that time it was too late. I don't think they would have gotten the information down to all the other units because there just wasn't enough time."

However, the most affecting experience Mr. Franco had while in Europe occurred just after the war had ended. While traveling to Paris, he found himself on a train full of refugees, concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war, and forced laborers. Some were still in their camp uniforms. "Each station we stopped at had crowds of people waiting in silence to see who would get off the train. You can imagine how these people got off—the combination of pure joy and abject sorrow. . . . At the third station I pulled down the blinds." Experiences like this one made him realize "what being a part of this crusade meant, and what this crusade was. I think many Americans felt that way, but maybe not as deeply as I did. To be part of this momentous juncture in history was something that was the highlight of my life. I don't care what I've accomplished. I mean, to have your

21st birthday the week that Paris was liberated. It's all very heady."

This sentiment is, in part, what inspired him to write his book, *Code to Victory*, which was released in mid-October by Sunflower Press. His main motivation, though, was to preserve the memory of his outfit, salvaging their achievements "from the dustbin of history" and bringing them out from under the shadow of Ultra. Their day-to-day work gave the air force the critical information it needed to pinpoint German locations and movements. It was in the hopes of encouraging students to continue examining the past that Mr. Franco established the Queens College History Department's Annual Prize for Historical Revisionism. In addition, Mr. Franco said, "When I saw what was happening with Holocaust revisionism, it was more than I could stand. I wanted to do what I could. All history is revisionism, let's face it. Unless you're the first one to write the story, you're just writing revisions of the first book written." He hopes that this prize will encourage students of history to understand the distinction between historical revisionism and reinvention of the facts.

Now living in Manhattan with his wife (also a Queens College graduate), Mr. Franco continues to work at his insurance company, lecture at schools, libraries, and museums, and travel through Europe. In fact, just a few days after this interview took place, Mr. Franco headed off yet again for another trip to France. He is indeed a reconnaissant, and has given generously back to Queens College for what it has given him. In addition, it is clear that his book promises to preserve the memory of his intelligence unit by giving it the recognition it deserves.

### **Q.C. WAS READY Even on "National Defense" Day**

It was pretty much of a joke back in September 1941, when the faculty donned fire hats and learned to knot ropes in the city-wide drive to enlist



## Brief Stories

volunteer firemen and air raid wardens.

But as far back as then, Queens College was demonstrating that it was not lagging in its duties as a public-minded people's college. "Queens College was not caught unawares by Pearl Harbor," Dr. Barry Commoner of the Committee for Civilian Defense declared at the Dec. 9 rally.

Augmenting their work as wardens and firemen, 55 faculty members surrendered part of their Christmas vacation to take an intensive training course conducted by Army, Police, and Fire Department officials. Before Pearl Harbor, too, four faculty members were already busy as speakers with the Office of Civilian Defense.

### LAGGARDS FOR DEFENSE

#### The Ethics of Patriotic Hush Money<sup>8</sup>

But there were other ways — less formal, less ordered — by which Queens College met the challenge of the Axis.

Late in the Fall term, even before December 7, Professor Jack Hexter of the English<sup>8</sup> history courses thought up the scheme called "playing pushkis." A little tired of tardy students, and a lot interested in national de-

fense, Doc Hexter decided to assess late students one penny for every minute late to class, the revenue to go to the Dean's fund in the form of defense stamps and bonds.

The scheme fired the imagination of faculty and students, and only a few weeks later, a score of classes adopted the idea. Dr. Oscar Shaftel elaborated upon it slightly, and decreed that if he was late he'd pay two cents per minute.

"Pushkis," of course, are the little receptacles used to house the dough. Dudley Straus' pushki was a whimsical elephant-bank; F. X. Nulty used a prosaic mayonnaise jar, while Doc Hexter was satisfied with a bottle held together with adhesive tape.

But it was left to Dean Kiely to add the glamorous finishing touch to the episode.

Should America, the Dean wondered, profit by the wages of sin? Acknowledging \$.34 collected in the first week by Dr. Hexter, Dean Kiely claimed that "I find myself twixt Scylla and Charybdis." Are the pennies, she asked, hush money, conscience money, or plain penitential pence?



**J. H. Hexter and Students**

*Silhouette Yearbook, June 1942*

"With one breath I condemn the low estate from which the riches rise and in another I hail the brave impulse by which my treasury makes unto itself friends of the Mammon of Iniquity."

Dean Kiely finally decided to OK the patriotic device with this compromise—"For that which you are, I weep; for that which you give, I rejoice—gratefully."

### QUEENS COLLEGE

#### HISTORY ALUMNI NEWS

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