



T.J. KIRKPATRICK REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Mike Anderson, a Prospect resident and Vietnam veteran, holds pages from his late grandmother's photo album with a picture of Phil Edwards, a Naugatuck soldier who died in World War I, at Anderson's home on Thursday.

WWI vet's story links two

Prospect residents find ties to each other's pasts in separate family quests

BY EMILY BEAVER
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PROSPECT — Ben Edwards has been intrigued by his ancestor Pvt. Philip Edwards since he was 10, when he found an old newspaper clipping about the World War I soldier's funeral tucked away in a family Bible in his Prospect home.

Mike Anderson, a Prospect resident, became interested in Philip Edwards as an adult, after he found photographs of the Naugatuck soldier in an album his grandmother left him after she died in 1999.

For both Anderson and Ben Edwards, the story of Philip Edwards sparked a passion for researching their family histories, which are rich with the stories of relatives who served in wars dating back to the American Revolution. In 2006, Anderson and Ben Edwards realized they were connected by their fascination with Philip Edwards.

Anderson, who is 52, began to subscribe to genealogy Web sites and searched through census records after his grandmother died. Anderson said he researched Philip Edwards along with his family members because someone in



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Prospect resident Mike Anderson began researching Pvt. Philip Edwards of Naugatuck after finding this photo of Edwards with his sweetheart Ella Winger, of Derby, in his grandmother's photo album in 1999.

FAMILY: Visit to grave leads to discovery of CD

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his family cared about him enough to save his photo.

Anderson learned that Philip Edwards lived on Rubber Avenue in Naugatuck, not far from where his grandmother lived. Anderson believes his grandmother and Edwards belonged to the same circle of friends.

Later, Anderson found a wartime questionnaire in the Connecticut State Library that Philip's parents had filled out after he was killed in action in Chateau-Thierry, France, in 1918. Anderson also found information in the library indicating that Edwards, along with Anderson's grandmother, was buried in the Grove Cemetery in Naugatuck.

"This stuff exists, you just have to drill down to find it," said Anderson, who is a veteran of the Vietnam War.

In May 2006, Anderson decided to visit the grave site while his sons were taking karate lessons at a studio in a nearby shopping plaza. When Anderson found Philip Edwards' grave, he saw a CD case in front of the grave. Anderson said he assumed that it had been left behind by partying teenagers.

The CD was an audio book of "One April in Boston," a children's book Ben Edwards published in 2000 about Benjamin Edwards, his fourth great-grandfather who grew up in colonial Boston. The historical novel, which is no longer in print, describes the lives of several generations of the modern-day Ben Edwards' ancestors, including Philip Edwards.

When Anderson found the CD, he said he experienced the strange sensation that someone else knew who Edwards was.

Anderson left the CD at the grave site, but took note of the book's author and publisher.

"I thought someone left the CD there for a reason, and who was I to take it?" he said.

But he searched the Internet for Ben Edwards, who had moved from Prospect to Boston around 2001. When Anderson found an e-mail address for Ben Edwards, he contacted Edwards about his family research and sent him photos of Philip Edwards with his girlfriend Ella Wininger, a nurse from Derby.

Ben Edwards said he left the CD while visiting the grave site in 2003 as a tribute to the soldier killed at age 23. When Anderson sent photos of Philip Edwards, "it was the greatest gift, the last missing item in a journey of discovery about my family," Ben Edwards wrote in a passage on a Web site dedicated to the soldier.

"It was quite a miracle, for lack of better words, because I always wanted a picture of Phil and Ella together," Ben Edwards said a recent telephone interview.

Before Philip Edwards joined the Connecticut National

TIPS FOR TRACING ROOTS

Ben L. Edwards, a children's book author who has conducted extensive family research, gives these tips for people tracing their family history:

- Write down everything you know about your family members, including names, birth dates and marriage dates. Try to confirm as much of the information as possible with records like birth certificates.
- Interview your family members.
- Look in local newspapers for stories that may have been published about your ancestors.
- Search genealogy Web sites such as www.ancestry.com, www.newenglandancestors.org, www.familysearch.org and www.genealogy.com. Fees may be associated with some of these sites.
- Check with a local library or genealogy society, which may have a published history about your family.
- Go to family reunions.
- Try to "connect the dots," using evidence you've found about your ancestors and information you know about the time period.
- Make a family tree or publish your family history online.

Guard, he delivered groceries in a wagon and was beloved by local children, Ben Edwards said.

Edwards, who is 46, now gives historical tours of Boston and speaks to students about writing and setting goals, which he says in an underlying theme of "One April in Boston." Edwards has also created extensive Web sites about his family history.

Both Anderson and Ben Edwards, who have never met in person, want people who are searching for their family histories to know records and Internet searches can help them.

When Edwards began researching his genealogy, he said he had practically nothing — an 1812 family Bible that had a newspaper story about Philip Edwards' funeral, which was described as "one of the most impressive military funerals ever held in Naugatuck."

To learn more about the soldier, Ben Edwards interviewed surviving friends of Philip Edwards. He recruited friends to search through newspaper clippings, hired a genealogy researcher and contacted a French military historian.

"I had this desire, this determination to be like Sherlock Holmes and find this out," Ben Edwards said.

"It's amazing where it ended up."