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# V-E-Day

## Victory in Europe

Greece resident Ralph Bleier (center), a sergeant in the U.S. Army, stood at the Elb River with two Russian soldiers April 26, 1945.



Submitted photo



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
Father John S. Hayes, who served as chaplain and major for General George Patton's Third Army, holds an old photo from his service days.

STORY BY MIKE LATONA  
STAFF WRITER

## Anniversary sparks vivid memories for vets

Even though he was imprisoned just outside the German city of Hamburg in early May of 1945, Salvatore Lodato had no idea that Germany's surrender was imminent.

In fact, Lodato was unclear about many aspects of World War II: he had spent the previous 20 months as a prisoner of war after being captured by German troops in Salerno, Italy.

Lodato, 81, a parishioner at St. Ann's Church in Hornell, clearly recalls the day — May 5, 1945 — when he and his fellow American POWs discovered they would no longer be required to perform hard labor on German farms.

"We got to the Hamburg area and began digging foxholes. The Germans said, 'You don't need to,' and they skipped out," Lodato recalled. "They didn't announce they were leaving. A little while later, we noticed there was nobody around."



Submitted photo  
Father John S. Hayes (right) stood with his brother, Brian Fitzgerald Hayes, in Nancy, France, in 1944.

Lodato, a private first class in the 45th division of the U.S. Army's Second Chemical Battalion, was rescued by Army troops later that day.

"We started jumping up and down, yelling and screaming," Lodato said. "There were times we had thought we weren't coming back (home) at all, that there was no way."

John Powers, 71, an Elmira resident, can also relate to the feeling of jubilation after a harrowing experience with the Germans. A sergeant in the Army's Eighth Air Force, Powers' plane had been shot down in March of 1945 over the Oder River

on the border of Germany and Poland. He survived the ordeal by bailing out and falling into the Allied hands of Russian troops, who were occupying the Oder at that point.

Powers was on "flak leave" — vacation time granted to soldiers who have been involved in bombing missions — in Man-

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