

# SENIOR LIFESTYLES

## Monk receives WWII medals after 55-year wait

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Jack Maher narrowly escaped death several times during World War II. He returned to civilian life blind in one eye, and scarred by gunshot wounds and artillery fragments.

Then there's Brother Sebastian, who has lived among the peaceful confines of Mount Saviour Monastery for nearly 40 years.

It would be hard to imagine men with more opposite lifestyles. Except, in this instance, we're not talking about two people.

Maheer and Brother Sebastian are one in the same person.

Brother Sebastian Maher, OSB — who took that name in 1964 — quietly observes each Veterans' Day in the presence of his fellow Benedictine monks. He said the monastic lifestyle is, and has been, a perfect fit for him.

"It just seems like how a normal human being lives. We pray, we have a camaraderie," said Brother Maher, who will observe his 84th birthday Nov. 17. "I'm very happy. It's been a wonderful thing."

Brother Maher's young adulthood was much more dramatic. He served three years in the U.S. Army during World War II, earning numerous medals for his duty in North Africa and Europe. Among them are the Purple Heart, on three occasions; the Bronze Star Medal, twice; the World War II Victory Medal; and the state's highest military honors, the Conspicuous Service Cross and Conspicuous Service Star.

Yet for all these honors, Brother Maher never possessed any of the actual medals until very recently.

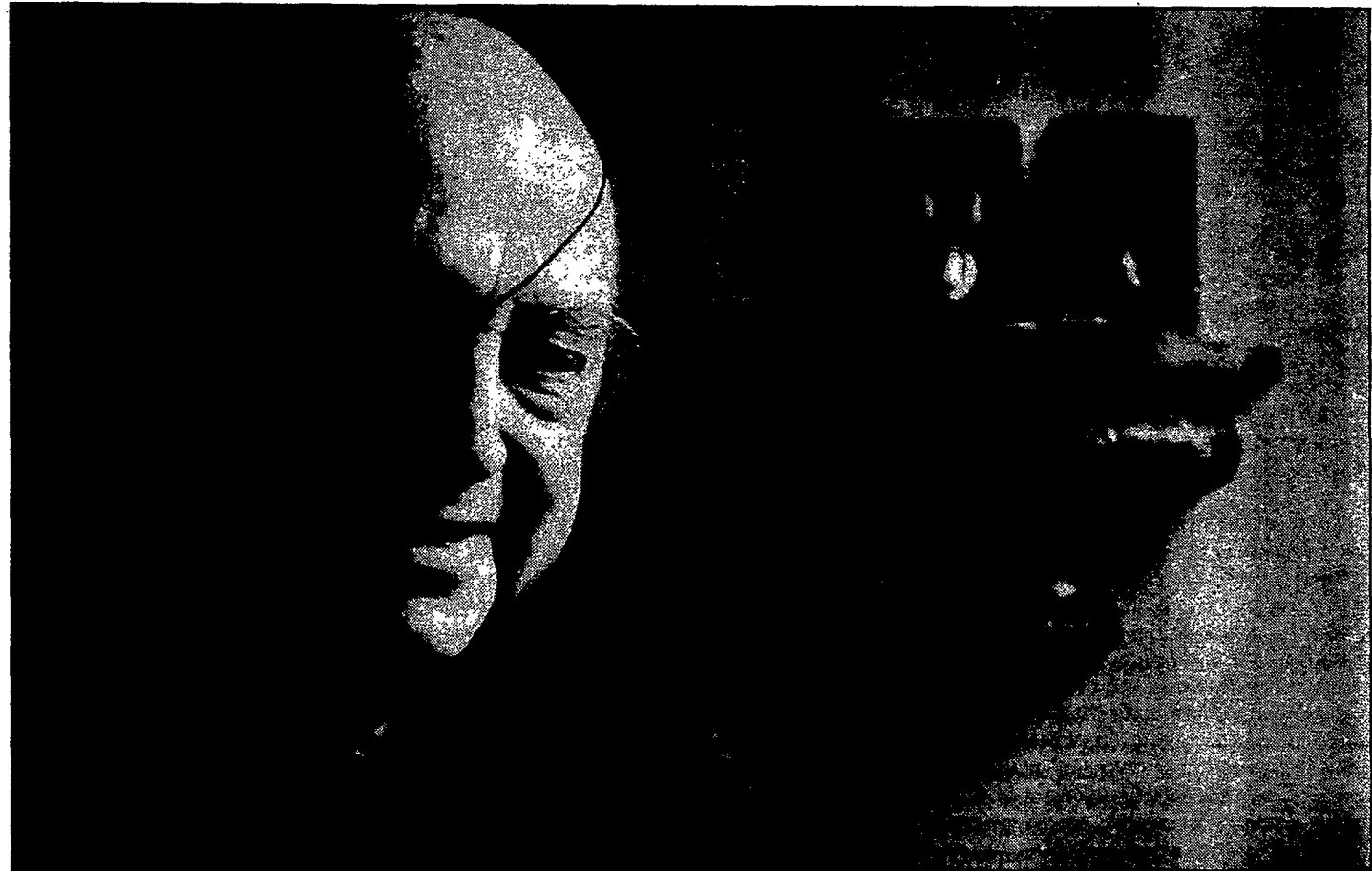
Michael Lehmann, counselor for the state Division of Veterans' Affairs, has come to know Brother Maher through several visits to Mount Saviour. Two years ago he learned of the monk's military history, as well as the fact that he had never been formally presented with his medals. Lehmann, a parishioner at Elmira's East-side Catholic Parish, made arrangements for new medals to be manufactured. They were mailed to Brother Maher last year.

Brother Maher lauded Lehmann's efforts, saying, "I was reconciled to the fact that I never would receive them."

Lehmann said that Brother Maher's medals should have been presented upon his discharge in 1945, but he had spent so much time in hospitals that an oversight occurred. When he finally returned home, it became up to him to ask for the medals, but he never pursued the matter.

Now, Brother Maher can add the medals to another important military memento he keeps at the monastery: The American flag that belonged to his late father, who served in the Spanish-American War. Brother Maher said he plans to be buried with the flag.

Brother Maher was born in Philadelphia and grew up in New Jersey, joining the Army in 1942. He served two tours with



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Brother Sebastian Maher, OSB, has lived at Mount Saviour Monastery in Pine City for nearly 40 years. Behind him are the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star, two of the many medals he received for heroic service during World War II.

the 39th Infantry, rising to the rank of first lieutenant.

He was first wounded in action in March 1943 in Tunisia. Slightly over a year later, he received more severe wounds — in two incidents a month apart — while fighting in France. His injuries reflect the intense, dangerous conditions that felled numerous comrades and enemies.

"Many of them were dispatched to their early reward," he said.

After being discharged, Brother Maher worked for several years in New Jersey for the state Department of Veterans' Services and for the Attorney General's office. Though he was born Catholic, Brother Maher said he didn't become firm in his faith until this part of his life, when he began attending daily Mass.

Brother Maher made his initial visit to

Mount Saviour after becoming attracted to the monastic life through the writings of Thomas Merton. "I felt it was about time I did something for the Lord," he remarked. "I was not trying to escape obligations, but to fulfill an obligation to the Lord."

Brother Maher entered the monastery in 1963, at age 45. He made his final profession of vows in 1967.

Mount Saviour — which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year — is located in Pine City, just a few miles west of downtown Elmira. The community of brothers and priests lived a simple lifestyle and practices monastic spirituality according to the Rule of St. Benedict.

The facility is also well-known to visitors who travel up Monastery Road's steep incline. Many come for day visits and to make purchases at the monastery's gift

shop filled with religious books and keepsakes. Other people stay on retreat for several days, residing in the guest house located on monastery grounds. Brother Sebastian said that he and his fellow monks take great care to continue providing a hospitable setting for the wider community.

"The function here is to keep this thing going; so people have the opportunity to renew their lives," he said.

Brother Sebastian has served in several roles during his time at Mount Saviour, most notably as past treasurer for nearly 20 years. He joked that one of his wartime injuries — which causes him to wear a patch over one eye — kept him from performing some duties on the monastery's farm land.

"They wouldn't let me milk the cows, because they were afraid the cows might kick in the other eye," he remarked.

### THE HURLBUT

Three Generations of Caring

We are a full service medical facility providing the following services for the comfort of our patients, residents, and guests.

#### We Provide:

- Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services for Short Term Stays on our Rehabilitation Unit
- Specialized Care Services in the form of: Infusion Therapy, Wound Care and Management, Tracheostomy, Colostomy, Ileostomy, and Gastrostomy Tube Care, Hospice Care
- Skilled Nursing Care and Rehabilitation for those in need of Long Term Care Placement
- Physical, Occupational, Speech/Language Therapy

Admissions and Tours Available  
7 Days a Week

1177 E. Henrietta Rd. Rochester, NY 14623  
(716) 424-4770 • Fax (716) 424-1922

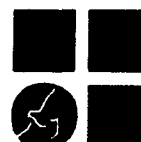
## SEABURY WOODS

AFFORDABLE,  
COMFORTABLE LIVING  
WHERE YOU'RE ALWAYS SOMEONE SPECIAL

*A New Senior Living Community in Gates*



- Patio homes for independent seniors
  - Enriched living apartments
  - Memory care studio apartments
  - Just off Buffalo Road, near Coldwater Road
  - No entrance fees
- Call 426-4950  
for more information



EPISCOPAL  
SENIOR LIFE  
COMMUNITIES

*Where you're always someone special*

