Twitter Thread by Marina Amaral



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[THREAD]

Okay. How do I explain what happened yesterday?

Colorizing photos is a lonely process. Before I even begin the colorization itself, I spend hours – or even days – reading, researching, studying, and finding stories. /1



It is time-consuming, sometimes emotionally draining, but just as enjoyable.

My work gave me the opportunity to meet incredible people: teachers, renowned historians, authors; and some became close friends.

But... /2

... even though all these encounters mean a lot to me, none of them are or were able to prepare me for the moments when I have the opportunity to talk to relatives of people portrayed in the photos that I colorized. /3

It is as if those “historical personalities” – strangers who become so close to me, in a weird way, since I spend so many hours in “their company”, restoring and applying colors to their faded photos – jump off the screen and materialize in front of me. /4

I cannot describe the feeling. This is what happened when Frank Garahan, son of Captain Thomas H. Garahan – portrayed in one of the dozens of World War II photos that I restored over the years, and which soon became one of my favorites – got in touch via Twitter. /5

When war broke out, Tomas H. Garahan was 28 years old, married for two years with one daughter, Kathy, and his wife, Kate, pregnant with their second child. He was older than most of his troops... /6

... had completed officer training and reached the rank of Captain in the 398th Regiment, Company E. Writing letters to Kate was a habit he practiced whenever possible, and fortunately, Kate saved all of his correspondence while overseas. /7

You can read some of them here: https://t.co/BexWxcccfL

After reading these letters (quite a few times, I imagine) and his father’s raw first-person accounts, Frank decided to embark on a journey and retrace his footsteps. /8

Frank's account is available on the same website, but I’d like to focus on a particular bit to explain how our worlds collided – Mine, Captain Garahan’s and Frank’s – so many decades later. /9



On March 16th at 7:30 am, E Company, followed by the second battalion, entered the streets of Bitche. The townspeople quickly became aware that liberation was at hand. /10

Among the first to greet the troops was George Oblinger, innkeeper and proprietor of Auberge le Strasbourg.

He brought out the American flag that his wife Maria had secretly created and presented it to Captain Thomas H. Garahan. /11



Soon after receiving the flag, Tom, with a few members of his company, took the flag to a second-floor apartment above a shop, just a few doors away. A war correspondent photographer was present and took the photo.

And this is where I enter the story. /12



Letter from Tom to Kate, April 4, 1945 Germany: "(...) Guess the shot of the flag made it newsworthy. That flag had been hidden in a pillowcase for two years under the noses of the Germans, awaiting the advent of the Americans. It was the first one to be flown in the town... /13

... and was the signal for scores of French flags to be dug out of hiding and displayed. Being the first ones in that place was quite a thrill, especially because it had never been taken in the history of warfare." /14

I colorized the original black and white photograph back in 2016, when a fellow colorist, Doug Banks, sent it over. That photo means so much to me that it has become a habit to republish it every year on my social media channels. /15

This is what I did yesterday, not knowing what would happen a few hours later. /16

https://t.co/8XILnEDNur



Hi Marina, The officer holding the flag is my father. I have been to Bitche many times and your color photo is in a new museum there. The flag was made in secret from the Nazis during occupation by a woman in the hotel next to the photo. It was given to my father to fly that day

— Frank Garahan (@fgarahan) December 13, 2020

https://t.co/mHg4yEWn2z



I was ecstatic. As soon as I saw the tweet, I sent a private message to Frank, and he explained how he first came across the colorized photograph: “The short version is our family was always enamored with the photo but our father rarely spoke about it... /18

... After he died in 1988 we engaged his troops at reunions and when you colorized the photo it brought new life to the event and I became determined to learn more. /19

This let to my trip and how the town has embraced your artwork as the most important milestone of the legacy of a history going back centuries. You should be so proud of your contribution to the history of Bitche France.” /20

So I told Frank that after a week in which I let the imposter syndrome take over a few times, his message was everything I needed. I think the word here is serendipity. 21/

People often say that my work transforms lives. I dare to contest and say that I am the one who undergoes a profound transformation every time I have the privilege of hearing and telling these stories. /22

If there is someone who spends a lot of time immersed in the past, it is me, but now I know that sometimes when past and present collide, amazing things can happen.



https://t.co/ELwCZozHyS

And yes, @fgarahan and I will stay in touch and will soon become best friends.

(Thank you again, Frank. You saved my year!).

Read more about Tom’s (and Frank’s) journey: https://t.co/BexWxcccfL