

Colonel Alfred Shehab, U.S. Army (Ret.)



Like many American tales, the story of Alfred Henry Mahmoud Shehab started far outside the borders of the United States., in a world quite different from what would be his homeland.

He would never have been an American at all had his grandfather, scion of a royal Middle Eastern family and an emir of the ruling tribe — not become angry when his own son fell in love with a commoner. He sent the young man, Emir Haleem Shehab, to America to get over his crush. There, he met a Lebanese-American woman named Marion, fell in love again and got married. Their child, Alfred Shehab, was born in Cape May, N.J., in 1919.

Because he's the son of an emir, Alfred Shehab, too, is a Lebanese prince by birth, possibly the only one to serve in the U. S. Army during World War II. The family never moved back to the Middle East.

Almost from the beginning, Shehab showed a keen interest in the military — no surprise, perhaps, for a young man whose ancestors include generals and military leaders dating back to the Crusades.

As World War II began to rage across Europe, Shehab tried to enlist, first in the Finnish Army, and later with the French Free Forces. He was preparing to board a boat to France in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join the French fighters when his father learned of his second enlistment and intervened. He contacted a relative to pull the young Shehab off the vessel.

Instead, at age 22, Shehab joined the [U.S. Army](#).

Shehab had an illustrious career as an Army officer. Leading the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, a unit of the 102nd Cavalry Group. His was the first American unit to enter Paris and, then, Germany.

One harsh winter in 1944, as he led an encampment of soldiers near a European forest, it never occurred to Alfred H.M. Shehab, then a brash young Army lieutenant, that he and his 30-man unit were a part of military history. The German's had unleashed their Operation "Watch on the Rhine" which more famously came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge.

As it was, the 3rd Platoon of B Troop in the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized) held its ground during the bloody Battle of the Bulge of [World War II](#), protecting 1,300 yards of front-line terrain over six weeks of fighting in one of the harshest Western European winters on record.

As the battle raged through late December and early January, Shehab's men — fortified by concertina wire, armed with a few 50-caliber machine guns and sleeping in ice-lined foxholes — held their ground, and so did the rest of the "38th Cav." Monschau was the northernmost Allied position to hold at the Battle of the Bulge.

The unit won a citation from 1st Army headquarters. "Although artillery observation posts were overrun, the personnel fought with small arms to maintain their positions and adjusted devastating fire upon waves of German infantry," it read. "The gallantry and combined skill of this force resulted in 200 enemy killed, 31 prisoners taken and countless casualties inflicted ... and contributed largely to the ultimate defeat of the German offensive in the Ardennes."

One captured Nazi officer, asked why the offensive had failed, said, "because our right flank at Monschau ran its head against a wall." Get him to tell you what happened to the bottles of rum found on two captured German soldiers.

Shehab later realized he and his men had played a notable part in repelling a German offensive that came dangerously close to changing the course of history.

Lieutenant Shehab and his unit later went on to meet the Bolsheviks at Torgau, Germany, on the Elbe River.

Later in his career he served as the armor advisor to Saudi Arabia, and in 1958 he served as the special assistant to commander, American Land Forces, Middle East in Lebanon.

For his part in freeing the French people and in recognition of his remarkable military career, a grateful France awarded him its highest honor in March 2013: at the French Embassy in Washington, D.C., he received the French Legion of Honor medal.

After he retired from the Army in 1964, Shehab enjoyed another long career at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. After a second retirement in 1984, he plunged into a new mission as commander in chief of the Military Order of World Wars.

Of particular note to us this evening, Colonel Shehab became a strong supporter and advocate of the Odenton Volunteer Fire Company, mobilizing community and political support in times of need.

In appreciation of his lifetime of service and for his friendship to the Odenton Volunteer Fire Company the Board of Directors hereby award the Honorary Title of Life Member to Colonel Alfred Shehab.