

George Goodwin

U.S. Army 8th Infantry Division



George Goodwin's
U.S. Army WWII
8th Infantry Division

Dad was drafted into the army November 2, 1943, at age 37, with a wife and four children at home. He went through 17 weeks of infantry basic training at Camp Blanding, Florida. After a ten day furlough in Alton, he returned to Camp Blanding where he was assigned as a rifle instructor. During basic training he had qualified as expert or sharpshooter on the rifle, carbine and pistol. His excellent eyesight and his experience with rifles and shotguns, as a boy in Kentucky, probably had something to do with being assigned as a rifle instructor.

Sometime around June, 1944, Dad was shipped to Fort Kilmer, New Jersey, for processing and assignment to the European Theater of Operations (ETO). On July 18, he left New York harbor on a troopship for France. After 11 days he landed on Utah beach in Northern France where he joined the 8th Infantry Division. He was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment as a private, Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Rifleman 745, army serial number 36 768 984.

28th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division

The 8th Infantry Division, a.k.a. "The Pathfinders"

and "The Golden Arrow" Division, part of the First Army, VIII corps, landed on Utah Beach July 4, 1944, 28 days after D-day. The three regiments of the division were the 13th, 28th and 121st Infantry Regiments. On Aug 1, VIII corps was assigned to the new Third Army under the command of General George Patton. Dad arrived in the European Theater July 29, 1944, as one of many infantry replacements which arrived in the ETO from D-Day until the war was over.

Northern France Campaign

The division first went into action July 8, just north of the town of Le Haye Du Puits, France on the Cherbourg Peninsula. Casualties were heavy, as might be expected, among troops in combat for the first time. Around July 12, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 28th Regiment, was badly mauled by the enemy (this may be why Dad was assigned to Company L when he arrived on July 29, 1944). He was assigned to his outfit shortly after arrival and went into battle immediately as the division fought their way through the cities of Coutances and Avranches.

From Coutances, France, VIII Corps advanced through Avranches, fighting the defending Germans, on their way to the port city of Brest on the Brittany peninsula. The 8th Division and the 4th Armored Division were diverted to capture the city of Rennes. From Rennes they advanced to the heavily fortified city of Dinard, west of St. Malo, which fell August 16, 1944.

On August 25, the division initiated the attack on the outer defenses of Brest and made an all out assault on the fortress city September 8. The Germans surrendered the city September 18. The capture of Brest was important to re-establish it as a shipping port to unload supplies and troops. Up until this was accomplished, troops, equipment and supplies were brought ashore on the Normandy beaches by landing craft.

On September 15, the division shifted south to take the city of Crozon. The 3rd Battalion of the 28th Regiment lead the attack. All officers of Company L became casualties. Tech. Sergeant Charles E. Ballance reorganized the company and took command. He was killed by a sniper the next day. The Crozon peninsula was cleared on September 19.

The above actions were taken to clear the Germans from the north coast of France after D-Day. The invading Allied armies then moved south and east from Normandy toward Paris and the German Border. This was part of the Northern France Campaign that took place between July 25 and September 14, 1944.

On September 21, the regiment regrouped at Landernau. From September 21 to 26 the order called for rest, recreation and training. On September 26, a Regimental review was held and awards were presented by the

George Goodwin

U.S. Army 8th Infantry Division

commanding general of the 8th Division. This is probably where the troops received their Combat Infantry Badges. The division then drove across France by rail and motor, through Luxembourg, to the German border where they arrived September 30.

While VIII Corps had been clearing Germans out of the north coast on the Cherbourg, Brittany and Crozon peninsulas, other allied forces were moving south and east, pushing the retreating Germans back through Paris and on to the German border. At this point most of France, Belgium, Luxembourg and parts of Holland had been liberated. The Allied armies now faced the vaunted German Siegfried-Line running almost the entire length of the German border.

The Siegfried-Line, or west wall, as the Germans called it, was an elaborate chain of massive concrete fortifications and anti-tank defenses stretching along much of Germany's western frontier. It consisted of interlocking pillboxes, gun encasements, bunkers and observation posts constructed in the late 1930's before the outbreak of war.

The 8th Division was assigned a 23 mile front along the Our River, the German-Luxembourg boundary. It was divided into three sectors. The 28th Infantry was assigned to the center sector where no American offensive had been taken. At this point it was mostly a holding action waiting for supplies to catch up with the fast moving Allied Armies.

In the town of Clerveaux, Luxembourg, the 8th Division established a rest camp to provide relaxation for the battle-weary troops. Each combat unit of the division was permitted to send a quota of 300 men to the rest camp every three days. Soldiers were given clean, comfortable rooms in the town hotels, provided with adequate recreational opportunities, and granted freedom to spend their time as they saw fit.

The Hurtgen Forest - Rhineland Campaign

On November 19, the 8th Division moved into the area south of Aachen, Germany, to relieve the badly defeated 28th INFANTRY DIVISION (Note: Not the 28th Infantry Regiment) in the heavily defended Hurtgen Forest near the towns of Vossenack and Schmidt, Germany. The 8th Division was transferred to V Corps, First Army. This was the beginning of the roughest fighting the 28th Infantry Regiment was to experience — The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest.

From December 1- 6 the 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, (which included Dad's Company L) was cited for outstanding performance of duty against the enemy for which they were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. I believe this is where Dad, along with other members of his regiment, won his Bronze Star.

Battle of the Bulge - Ardennes Campaign

During the night of December 16, a violent counteroffensive by the enemy crashed through a 45 mile front of Allied territory between Germany and Luxembourg just south of the

8th Division sector. The enemy had thrown it's best troops, well equipped and strongly supported by armor and air power, into an all-out attempt to break the Allied drive into Germany. The resulting attack pushed back a section of the Allies' front line creating a "bulge" that lasted until January 25, 1945, when the Germans were defeated and pushed back into Germany. This became known as "The Battle of the Bulge".

On December 18, the 8th Division was attached to the VII Corps, and directed to hold all ground previously gained, as well as assisting other VII Corps units by fire and reinforcements, if called upon. Heavy casualties were suffered during the battle. There are many stories of new replacements going up on the line one night only to be killed before morning. The books I have read emphasize the fact that the more experienced in combat the men were, the more likely it was they would survive.

Although the 8th Infantry Division, or the 28th Infantry Regiment, are not officially listed as being in the Ardennes Campaign, some of it's units apparently were involved in the fighting. Dad's separation papers show his campaigns as Northern France, Rhineland and Ardennes. I have heard him talk about being in the Battle of the Bulge and Mom talked about him being in it in the tapes we recorded before she died in 1984.

Return to the U.S.

On January 19, 1945, Dad was removed from the front lines and hospitalized with severe arthritis and a hearing problem. Living in the foxholes in the rain, mud, snow and cold, was apparently too much for a 39 year old soldier. The average soldier's age was 21 or 22. The amazing thing is that he wasn't killed or wounded during the six months he served on the front lines.

He was removed from a field hospital and sent to England for further treatment. On March 4, 1945, he left England by troop ship. He arrived home in the U.S. on March 17. After a 30 day furlough in Alton he was sent to Ashburn General Hospital, McKinney, Texas, where he received additional treatment. On June 11, 1945, he received a medical discharge and returned home to 913 Rixon Street in Alton.

Somewhere along the line he was promoted to Private First Class (Pfc). In addition to numerous campaign ribbons, he received the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Bronze Star which was awarded for "Exemplary conduct in the ground combat against the armed enemy during the Rhineland Campaign". He also received, along with his 3rd Battalion, the "Presidential Unit Award" for their actions in the Hurtgen Forest.

When Dad returned home he went back to the steel mill where he worked until 1962 when, due to a stroke at age 56, he had to take early retirement. He received a small disability pension from the army until he

George Goodwin

U.S. Army 8th Infantry Division

died March 10, 1985, at age 79. He was a long time member of the "Veterans of Foreign Wars" and on a few occasions marched in the parade in Alton on Veteran's Day. When he died, his eulogy was given by the VFW chaplain. The American flag that covered his coffin was handed to me which I, in turn, gave to my brother, Dick.

Dad never talked much about his war time experiences. I am sure he experienced some terrible things he preferred to forget, but I know he was proud of his military service. After the research I have done the last several years I have come to appreciate much more what he went through. We should be proud that he served and we should realize how lucky we are that he survived. I remember once when he was asked about his Bronze Star he said " We were just standing around one day and they came around and handed them out". I'm sure it was a little more than that.

BRONZE STAR INFORMATION

By direction of the President, under the provisions of Executive Order 9419, 4 February 1944, (Sec. II, WD 3, 1944).

Awarded the Bronze Star Medal for exemplary conduct in ground combat against the armed enemy during the Rhineland Campaign, in the European Theater Of Operations while assigned as a private, 28th Infantry Regiment.

Authority - Paragraph 18 AR 600 - 45
Based on Gen Orders 25
Hq. 28th Infantry Regiment
George Goodwin 36 768n 982
Pfc. Company D 28th Infantry

George Raymond (Ray) Goodwin
Shingle Springs, CA
November 27, 2002