

# E. Darold Henson

*Served in Three Campaigns of the European Theatre of Operations*

## U.S. Army

### 2nd Infantry Division, 38th Regiment



**Darold Henson**

Army Infantry  
2nd Infantry Division, 38th Regiment

Edward Darold Henson was drafted into the U.S. Army in January, 1944. At that time Darold was employed as a bus driver and custodian at Lincoln Community High School in Lincoln, Illinois. He was inducted at Fort Sheridan in Chicago and received basic training at Camp Blanding, Florida. He was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division, 38th Regiment. Darold saw action throughout the European Theater of Operations, specifically in the campaigns for Normandy and the Hedgerows, Brittany and

Brest, and the Ardennes, including the Battle of the Bulge.

Darold Henson was born in Lincoln, Illinois, on September 17, 1918, during the Spanish Flu pandemic. His parents were John and Ruth Ann Webb Henson, who had moved from southern Illinois to find employment at the Lincoln State School. Darold married Lydia Jane Wilson on October 14, 1940. Like Darold, she had grown up in the Postville (west) part of Lincoln. Her parents had owned and operated the Wilson & Son Grocery Store at the corner of Fifth and Washington Streets (on Business Route 66, "kitty corner" from Postville Park). Jane and Darold's children are Darold Leigh, born in 1942, and Linda Jane, born in 1946.

After basic training, Darold traveled by train to New York City. There, he boarded the Queen Elizabeth to sail for Glasgow, Scotland, and arrived on July 21st. From Glasgow he traveled by train to Southampton, UK, on the English Channel. He was there for several days before being sent to Normandy as a replacement soldier. That is, the unit he first belonged to was positioned behind the front lines as a resource to replace fallen soldiers. In Normandy, near Omaha Beach, Darold spent several days in a "replacement pool" before he was trucked to St.-Lo, located several miles south of Omaha Beach. From St.-Lo, his unit walked southeast to the front.

Throughout his WW II Army service, Darold was assigned to squads operating .30-caliber, water-cooled machine guns. Basic training also gave Darold experience with rifles and mortars. Darold's "Separation Qualification Record" specifies his job title as "heavy machine gunner 605," and this document includes the job description: "loads, aims, cleans, maintains, and fires heavy

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**Darold and Jane Henson**  
**Florida, 1944**

machine gun to provide automatic direct or indirect fire in support of other tactical units breaking through enemy defense [lines]. Estimates, ranges, and sets sights. Is responsible for control and coordination of machine gun squads and tactical employment of weapons."

Darold first participated in combat toward the end of July or beginning of August, 1944. He was

with the First Army as it advanced from St.-Lo toward Vire and Tinchebray in southern Normandy. One day during the hedgerow fighting in this area, the soldier standing next to Darold fell dead from a sniper's bullet. Some time later, Darold was a member of a seven-man machine gun squad that was walking in file along a hedgerow when a German soldier suddenly jumped out of the brush and began firing with a burp-gun pistol. Darold, who was #6 in the squad, felt the heat of a bullet pass on the right side of his neck. He dove into the nearby wheat field and stayed there until dark, when he made his way back to his company. There he found squad member #2-- the only other member of the squad who had survived the ambush.

In the early August hedgerow fighting, Darold was wounded with shrapnel in the right leg near the knee. The wound was not serious enough to keep him out of action for very long. By the middle of August, the Americans had taken Vire and Tinchebray. Then, Darold served with units of the 2nd Infantry Division in the campaign for Brittany and Brest, a major seaport on the western coast of France. Brest became an important city to take because the Germans were using it as a submarine base. Darold saw combat in the fighting on the outskirts of Brest in late August. By mid September, the Americans had taken Brest, and Darold's

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regiment began its journey eastward through Paris on the way to the front along the border of Belgium and Germany.

On the way to the eastern front, Darold's unit traveled by railroad cattle cars through Paris. Darold recalled seeing coal-fired train locomotives and French farmers wearing wooden shoes. He said he first saw unisex restrooms when he visited those fa-



**Darold Henson (front, 2nd from left) and other Army Trainees  
Camp Blanding, Florida  
1944**

cilities at the Paris train station. Darold said that a significant number of soldiers left the cattle cars to visit Paris and failed to return.

Darold was with units of the 2nd Infantry Division positioned on the Schnee Eiffel (mountain ridge) in October, 1944, just inside Germany. Darold said action on the Schnee Eiffel was moderate, for example, mortar shelling to let the Americans know "the enemy was there." During one brief leave, Darold said he had a taste for some ice cream and was able to get a cone at a local village.

Early in December the 2nd Infantry Division prepared for an offensive to take the Roer River

dams. They were located several miles north of the Schnee Eiffel. During the crucial winter fighting of 1944, Darold said that his squad often used calvados as a coolant for their machine gun. Calvados is a French apple brandy and was prevalent throughout the region. The alcohol in calvados prevents the brandy from freezing. Even with the coolant, Darold said the barrel of the machine gun became extremely hot.

Some time soon after the Battle of the Bulge began on December 16, 1944, Darold was evacuated because of trench foot--a problem of swollen, bleeding feet resulting from continuous exposure to water and freezing temperatures. In December, 1944, there was one non-combat-related casualty for every combat-related casualty. Darold recalled spending Christmas Day, 1944, in a Paris hospital. From there he was flown to Britain on a C-47 and then transported to the U.S. on a hospital ship, departing on February 21, 1945, and arriving February 27.

He recuperated in VA hospitals in Clinton, Iowa, and Indianapolis, Indiana, before being sent to Ft. Sam Houston for reassignment. He once hitchhiked home to Lincoln when he had a leave from the hospital in Clinton, Iowa. Later he was sent to Camp McCoy at Tomah, Wisconsin. Darold was honorably discharged from the Army of the United States at Camp McCoy on December 5, 1945. At the time of his discharge, he was paid

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\$100.00 and \$12.65 for travel expenses. Darold Henson was awarded the Purple Heart.

After his discharge Darold resumed his job at Lincoln Community High School. At the time he retired from LCHS in 1977, he was the director of buildings, grounds, and transportation. When he retired, Darold Henson was honored as the Lincoln Courier's Man of the Month. Jane Henson passed away in 1978. In 1988, Darold married Judy Robinson, a native of the Missouri Ozarks who had found employment at the Lincoln State School. Together, they have enjoyed metal detecting, fishing, and sharing time with family.

A separate tribute Web page presents Darold Henson's military experience in the context of the WW II campaign history of the 2nd Infantry Division. That Web page also features various photos of Darold and his family, including photos of them at the WW II Illinois Veterans War Memorial:

<http://findinglincolnillinois.com/daroldhensonWWII.html>

***Submitted by his son on behalf of a grateful family:***

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**Darold Henson**  
in 2002  
Wearing 2nd Infantry Division Cap  
(Mr. Henson passed in 2008)