

# William F. Powers

U.S. Army  
383rd INF



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William "Bill" Powers was born on October 11, 1916 in East Grove, Illinois to Michael and Theresa (O'Malley) Powers. He entered the Army on March 6, 1942 and was discharged on December 20, 1945. He served as a medic in the 383rd Infantry in the Pacific Theater. After his discharge he returned to live in Dixon, Illinois where he married Zita Bradley in 1952 and worked for Northern Illinois Gas Company until his death on June 6, 1972. Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain his story first-hand but feel that his story and those of all the men and women who served in WWII are important and should be told. What follows is his story told from his eldest daughter's perspective.

## Dad's Story

*My sister, brother and I were all born between 1953 and 1960. We were like many other children born to veterans of World War II. Our parents were strong hardworking people with a deep faith in God. Our mother was fairly open about her experiences growing up during the depression and as a young adult during World War II. However, with our Dad, it was a different story altogether. We knew he had served as a medic in the Pacific Theater, but we learned not to ask him questions about the war. Despite his silence, Dad's experiences in World War II lurked in every room of our home.*

*They lurked, for instance, in our living room. Every week we watched a T. V. show called *The Twentieth Century*. When it was on we had to be quiet and stay still. I could tell the show was different from others we watched, but I wasn't quite sure how*

*until much later. I remember planes dropping bombs, soldiers running and falling, fires burning, and people sticking pitchforks into truckloads of dead bodies. Later, when I heard real planes overhead, I wondered if they were going to drop bombs on us too. I never told my parents how scared the program made me feel because it seemed so important to them to watch it.*

Dad's war experiences lurked in our attic too. We discovered them by accident one day when we decided to open a green trunk. In it we found what we thought was a jack pot. There were green shirts, pants, and hats. They looked just like the ones worn by the actors on *Combat*, our favorite T.V. show. Farther down were pins with all sorts of colored ribbons on them. There was a round silver pin with a medical symbol on it. The best "treasure" was in a black box. We opened it to find a purple medal in the shape of a heart. Before we knew it, we were trying on all the clothes, and putting on the pins. Mom heard all the commotion and came upstairs to see what was going on. I'll never forget the strange look on her face. She told us to put everything back into the trunk and not to touch it again. She made sure everything was put back just the way we found it.

The war even lurked at Grandma's house. She once asked me if I had seen Dad's purple heart or his scar, but I didn't know what she was talking about. Her eyes filled with tears and she said, "I wish you could have known your Daddy before he went to that terrible war." "Don't be sad, Grandma," I said. "He came back."

One year, I discovered the war lurked at the Memorial Day parade. Dad's brother had served in the Korean Conflict. Every Memorial Day he dressed in his uniform and marched in the parade. During the parade, I asked Dad why he didn't get his uniform out of the attic and march with Uncle Bob. He looked at me for a long moment then said, "I never want to put on that uniform again." Because I knew Dad loved our country and was proud to be an American, his response was confusing to me at the time.

Mostly though, the war lurked at night. That's when it came to haunt Dad. Sometimes I would awaken in the dark to hear loud, agonized screams coming from Mom and Dad's bedroom. Dad would be shouting a name, telling someone to get down or to run. Then I would hear my mom's soothing voice saying, "Wake up, Bill. It's all right. It's only a dream."

One day I discovered Dad's war experiences even lurked in my high school U.S. History class. Most of the kids were excited about the assignment we had been given. They couldn't wait to interview someone who had been in World War II and find out all about their experi-

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ences. I was sure Dad would refuse to answer my questions. I was afraid to even ask. Somehow I got the words out and told Dad it wasn't me who wanted to know about the war, but my history teacher. He simply said, "Ask your questions." So, I did.

*Me: "What did you do in the Army?" I began.*

*Dad: "I was a medic in the Pacific."*

*Me: "What was your job like?" I went on.*

*Dad: "I had to go get wounded men during a battle if I could get to them and after a battle if I could still find them."*

*Me: "What did you do when you found them?" I asked.*

*Dad: "I tried to get them back behind our lines if I could save them. I stayed with them until they died if I couldn't do anything for them."*

*Me: "What was the hardest part of your job?" I went on.*

*Dad: "The worst part was after a battle hearing men screaming for a medic and sometimes not being able to find them."*

*Me: "What else would you like us to know about your war experience?"*

*Dad: "You tell your teacher the only guys who talk about the war are the ones who were able to fight it from behind a desk somewhere. The rest of us are just trying to live with it."*

I was sure I would fail the assignment because Dad hadn't said very much. After I presented my interview the teacher asked, "Do you really think he didn't say much?" It took growing up for me to realize that he had said it all.

Dad died in 1972, at the age of 55. I was 19, my sister was 15, and my brother was 12. After he passed away, Mom showed us a letter describing why Dad had received the Award of the Oak Leaf Cluster. What follows is a quote from that letter:

*"During an assault on Cactus Ridge, Okinawa Island, 5 April, 1945, a rifle company that was flanking the ridge ran into heavy enemy resistance and was pinned down by enemy machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. All available litter squads were in use when word came of two serious casualties. Quickly organizing makeshift litter squads, Staff Sergeant William F. Powers led his men across three hundred yards of terrain swept by enemy machine gun and artillery fire. Reaching the forward elements of the company, Staff Sergeant Powers, with utter*

*disregard for his own personal safety and at great risk to his life, crawled forward under the terrific enemy fire and returned with the wounded men. Staff Sergeant Powers' actions were an inspiration to all who witnessed them and are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service."*

I sometimes wonder about the two men Dad rescued that day. Who were they? Did either of them survive to live out their lives? If so, how were their lives changed because of what they went through on that far away island?

In 2004, my sister and I attended the dedication ceremony of the Illinois World War II Veterans Memorial. I looked with pride at the former service men and women gathered there. I sensed their selfless spirit and quiet dignity. Such was and is the character of the men and women who fought so bravely in that long ago conflict. Had Dad been alive, I'm not sure he would have attended. If he had, it would have been to salute his fallen and fellow comrades in arms, not to take any personal credit. I don't know that he would have approved of having a brick in his honor either. But my sister, brother and I placed one there anyway.

With love and sincere thanks,

Mary Powers, Anne Powers, Jerome Powers

Submitted by:  
Anne Powers  
March 2007