



Dencker, Donald Owen

382nd Inf Co L

SUN PRAIRIE—Donald Owen Dencker of Sun Prairie, passed away on Tuesday, Nov. 12, 2019. He was born on Nov. 25, 1924, to Frederick and Mabel (Toft) Dencker in Minneapolis, Minn. He grew up in Minneapolis and graduated from Roosevelt High School in June 1942. He studied at the University of Minnesota for one year until he entered the U.S. Army in June 1943. During his Army World War II duty, he served in Company L, 382nd Infantry Regiment, 96th Infantry Division and he fought the Japanese on Leyte, Philippines and Okinawa, Japan. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster and the Combat Infantryman Badge. During later years he was responsible for obtaining the long-delayed award of the Presidential Unit Citation to the 96th Infantry Division for extraordinary heroism and gallantry in action against the Japanese on Okinawa.

After returning home in January 1946, Don again attended the University of Minnesota where he was awarded the Bachelor and Master's Degrees in Civil Engineering. After graduating, he started work for Pfeifer & Shultz Engineers in Minneapolis in the environmental engineering field. However, the Korean War saw him called back to Army service which included duty in Company B, 802nd Engineer Aviation Battalion in Korea. There Don put his Civil Engineering training to work helping to build airfields for the 5th Air Force. Don returned from Korean service in June 1952 and restarted work for Pfeifer & Shultz Engineers.

On October 17, 1953, Don married Evelyn Holmen of Easton, Minn. From this marriage they had four daughters, Nancy, Kimberly, Lynn and Ann. Unfortunately, Evelyn died of lung cancer on April 20, 1972.

Don for two years was City Engineer of Columbia Heights, Minn. In February 1958 he began his 33-year career in management at Oscar Mayer Foods Corporation and moved to Monona, Wis. Concurrently he became a member of Trinity Lutheran Church of Madison. During his career at Oscar Mayer, Don became noted for his abilities in environmental engineering and construction management. He served as Chairman of the Environmental Committee of the American Meat Institute for 16 years and he presented numerous technical papers at environmental meetings. He also became a Diplomat of the American Academy of Environmental Engineers. In construction management, major projects included construction of new Oscar Mayer plants at Columbia and Kirksville, Missouri.

After retiring on March 31, 1991, Don did consulting engineering work for Oscar Mayer/Kraft Foods from 1991 to 1999. In addition, he did consulting engineering work overseas in Estonia, Poland, Jordan and Chile for the World Environmental Center and the Agency for International Development.

Don had been a faithful member of Trinity Lutheran Church of Madison, where he served in various positions, including President of the Congregation. He also served on the Board of Trinity Foundation.

Don actively supported the Civil Engineering Department of the Institute of Technology of the University of Minnesota by numerous gifts to the University of Minnesota Foundation. He was a member of Presidents Club Chancellors Society.

Don had been active for many years in the 96th Infantry Division Association, now the 96th Infantry Division Dead Eye Association. He was President of the Association and served many years as Historian. He arranged for 96th Infantry Division Monuments to be installed at Arlington National Cemetery, National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu, Hawaii and at the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Georgia, among others.

He wrote and had published Love Company, a book which details his World War II experiences and also a broad picture of Infantry combat against the Japanese on Leyte and Okinawa. Don also gave numerous talks about the battles of Leyte and Okinawa.

Don greatly enjoyed traveling and associating with his World War II comrades of the 96th Infantry "Dead Eye" Division. A highlight of each year was the annual reunion of the Division. He extensively traveled, visiting Norway and most other countries in Europe and the Far East. He also led many tours of the battlefields in the Philippines and Okinawa, Japan. Another highlight was the annual December 31st New Year's Eve reunion with high school buddies which started in 1946. Present then were Dean Rockman, Bob Kelly, Jim Heymer, Marcus Shelander, Willie Nordin and Don.

Don is survived by his four daughters, Nancy (Glenn) Pusch, Kimberly (Jim) Richardson, Lynn (Mike) Wahl and Ann (Gary Peroutka) Dencker; and two stepdaughters, Tanis (John) Schiess and Sheila Riggleman. He is also survived by his former second wife, Patricia Dencker. He has 14 grandchildren, Ryan Pusch, Alyssa (Nate) Dillon and Whitney Pusch; Jeremy (Sarah), Michael (Melissa) and Donald Sandsnes; Cody (Katie) and Hannah Wahl; Katelyn and Ben Peroutka; Nicholas and Kristina Schiess; and Shelby and Tatum Riggleman. He is further survived by three great-grandchildren, Marcus and Milo Sandsnes and Travis Sandsnes. He was preceded in death by his parents, Frederick and Mabel Dencker; and his first wife, Evelyn.

A funeral service will be held at TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, 1904 Winnebago St., Madison, at 1 p.m., on Monday Nov. 18, 2019. Burial will follow at Roselawn Memorial Park with full military honors. Visitation will be held at the church from 11 a.m. until the time of the service on Monday. Memorials are appreciated to Trinity Lutheran Church or the 96th Infantry Division Heritage Fund, <http://www.96thdeadeyes.org/donate.html>

The family wishes to thank St. Mary's Hospital, Waunakee Manor, and Agrace HospiceCare for their loving care in his final weeks. Online condolences may be made at www.gundersonfh.com.