

A Tribute to
Norman J. Poshusta

By Corey J. Lentz



Co. L 383rd Reg. 96th Infantry Division



Norman J. Poshusta, from Spillville Iowa, was born September 13, 1921. Prior to his military service, Norman worked for his father for two years after high school. He did carpentry work involving erecting wood structures. He also did interior and exterior trim, laid floor and building concrete forms.

On October 20, 1942 Norman enlisted into the military. On November 3, 1942, reported for active service at Camp Dodge Iowa. From there he was given his orders to report to Camp Adair Oregon and join Co. L, 383rd Reg, 96th Infantry Division, a newly activated Division later nicknamed "The Deadeyes" for their extensive training and emphasis on marksmanship.

While at Camp Adair, Norman completed Basic Training in February 1943. During which time, earning Weapons Qualification of Sharpshooter with his M-1 rifle. After Basic, Norman who was a Private, now was a Private First Class.



By May of 1943 the Division left for Fort Lewis Washington to begin combat team training. Then to central Oregon to the Oregon maneuver area. By November the Division was at Camp White Oregon in which they spent 5 ½ months. While there Norman wrote to his brother, Wilmer, April 7, 1944:

"Am going to school now. Have been going since the 2nd and will go till the 25th. From 8 am to 3 pm and pull no company duties. So it's really a easy life. The school is about "How to talk over a radio and telephone."

He became a Radio Operator, Intermediate Speed.



In the spring of 1944 the Division was designated an Amphibious Division. Late April the 96th moved to California. While there, received the specialized training and practice of making amphibious assaults along the southern California shores. In July, Norman and the rest of the Division headed to Camp Beale to stage for the San Francisco Port of Embarkation. Mid July the Division passed through the Golden Gate Bridge into the Pacific. Next stop, Hawaii. Norman wrote:

“Very beautiful trip – but was sea sick most of the time, so didn’t enjoy it very much.”

Norman reached Oahu and Schofield Barracks. While in Hawaii, more training, including a week of jungle training and more landing rehearsals. From there the Division left Hawaii to their planned island target. The Division was part of the XXIV Corps. As they left, they were informed of a last minute change. The XXIV Corps was going to be under the control of General MacArthur for the dramatic return to the Philippines. The new objective will be to attack Leyte in the Philippines. The 96th was to land near Dulag, seize control of the Catmon Hill Mass and the Dagami-Tanuan areas.



Norman wrote about Leyte:

“Landed on Leyte October 20 (D-Day) at about 10:30 am. No opposition. Had rough going in places. Worse weather and mosquitoes than I ever seen. Food was terrible. Had to be hand carried or flown in. Had to eat coconuts the first five days. Wish I was “4F” and back in Spillville.”

In the first 10 days the Division had achieved their goal. After which, were assigned mop-up and patrol assignments.

In February the Division learned of its new orders – the assault on Okinawa, an important key to victory. Late March they set sail for their new objective. With three days navel bombardment, Norman and the rest of the 96th was set to land on the beaches on April 1, 1945. Norman wrote:

“Landed on Okinawa on (L-Day) assault wave – easy landing, no opposition. A beautiful island but there were too many Japs -xx-.”

After landing, Norman and his Division turned and headed south to seek the enemy's main line of defense.



April 9 would come a day Norman and Company L would not soon forget. An assault on Kakazu Ridge. One that they would be recognized with honor and distinction with "Battle Honors" earning the Distinguished Unit Citation (later named the Presidential Unit Citation) the highest award a unit could receive.

Headquarters Tenth Army

Office of the Commanding General

BATTLE HONORS

As authorized by Executive Order No. 9396 (Sec I, Bulletin 22, War Department, 1943) superseding Executive Order No. 9075 (Sec III, Bulletin 11, 1942), the following unit is cited by the Commanding General, Tenth Army, under the provisions of Section IV, Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943 in the name of the President of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction. The citation reads as follows:

Company "L", 383d Infantry Regiment is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy on 9 April 1945 in the vicinity of Kakazu Ridge, Okinawa Island. This company was assigned the mission of assaulting a heavily fortified "T" shaped ridge spur in the NW extremity of the town of Kakazu, which gave the enemy complete observation and flanking fire on the entire regiment. The occupation of this spur which provided observation of the main enemy strong point along the entire ridge was of vital importance to the entire command. Company "L" gained complete surprise, and, with bayonets fixed, boldly and fearlessly charged the heavily defended position and attained the assigned objective. Company "G", 383d Infantry on the left and Company "I", 383d Infantry on the right encountered withering machine gun cross fire and intense mortar and artillery barrages and were unable to take the ridge in their sectors, this imperiling Company "L's" security. Superior enemy forces supported by heavy mortars and massed artillery launched four powerful and determined counter-attacks. Company "L", although weakened by severe losses, displayed unexcelled courage and prowess in arms by gallantly holding its objective through the grimly raging battle until ultimately the enemy was repulsed. Company "L" held this strategic position all day until forced to withdraw at 1630 because of severe flanking fire and a critical shortage of ammunition. This company killed 160 of the enemy, including one colonel and one major, and destroyed a 320mm mortar which had been harassing the regiment. Company

"L's" losses included ten killed in action, five missing in action, and thirty wounded. The conspicuous aggressiveness, valor, extraordinary heroism, and profound devotion to duty displayed by this company has been an inspiration to the rest of the regiment. The eminently significant accomplishment of this gallant and cohesive fighting force was instrumental in breaching the enemy defenses in this sector, enabling the entire command to advance. Such achievements evidence the finest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on Company "L", 383d Infantry and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

Many from Company L would be recognized and awarded medals for their actions. Norman was one of them, being awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

Headquarters 96th Infantry Division

AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

By direction of the President, under the provisions of Executive Order No. 9419, 4 February 1944 (Section II, Bulletin No. 3, War Department 1944), and pursuant to authority contained in AR 600-45 (Decorations), 22 September 1943, as amended by Change No. 3, 25 April 1944, a Bronze Star Medal is awarded by the Commanding General, 96th Infantry Division, to the following named military personnel:

Private First Class Norman J. Poshusta, 37439767, Infantry, United States Army. For heroic service in connection with military operations against the enemy on Okinawa Island on 9 April 1945. When his unit was cut off from all friendly troops and was subjected to a barrage of murderous enemy high angle fire from encircling positions, Private First Class Poshusta held his position for ten hours and maintained communications with higher echelons. When it became necessary for his unit to withdraw, Private First Class Poshusta, acting on his own initiative, ordered and directed the fire of artillery smoke shells, thus enabling the safe evacuation of the wounded and the successful withdrawal of the troops. Private First Class Poshusta's courage under fire and devotion to duty reflects great credit upon himself and the military service.

Continued difficult battles laid ahead for Norman. While advancing toward the Shuri Line and toward Conical Hill, came one of the most difficult. Norman wrote:

"- Really had a lot of tough going - Wounded twice by machine gun bullets on May 13, 1945 - which ended my army career - as I haven't been worth a damn since."

Norman received gunshot wounds to his right wrist, resulting in a compound fracture. Also a gunshot wound to his left thigh; both severe. He was evacuated to Hawaii by June 19, 1945. July 15th he was further evacuated to the United States, arriving in California July 16th. Then finally Norman was transferred to the Mayo General Hospital in Galesburg, Illinois to receive treatment for his injuries. Norman had split time for his treatment with transferring to Camp Carson Colorado during his stay at Mayo. Eventually staying at Camp Carson till he was Honorably Discharged from the Army on October 29, 1945 after which Norman headed for home. Upon discharge he wrote:

“Gained about 10 lbs. Leg and arm is bad shape from gunshot wound.”

He also wrote regarding a welcome home party:

“Got drunk myself at Fritz’s Tavern on November 14.”

During his time with the 96th Infantry Division, Norman had received the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, Asian Pacific Theatre with 2 Bronze Stars and 1 Arrow Head, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon, with 2 Bronze Stars, the ATCM, the coveted Combat Infantry Badge, and the Presidential Unit Citation twice; once for action on April 9th with Co. L, then again when the entire 96th Division for its action on Okinawa April 1 – June 30. An award rarely given to an entire Division.

After finally coming home and getting back to civilian life, Norman married Rosalyn in April 1947. They continued to live in Spillville and raised their four children. With his family and friends, Norman and Rosalyn’s house became one of the social “places to be” in their small town sharing many good times with them.

Norman had been diagnosed with cancer in early 1990 and passed away in December of that same year having been greatly missed ever since.

...personally, a difficult time for me. Norman was my Grandpa. The early part of my childhood was spent living just a couple blocks from him and my Grandma. Even while later, living two hours away, I would visit often. During that time Grandpa and I built a special relationship and we were close. Being able to spend alone time with him going fishing, going to a local baseball game, I grew to look up to him.

I never really knew about my Grandpa’s military career. All I knew of was of a couple framed certificates for the “Bronze Star” and “Purple Heart” hung on the wall. As a boy growing up Grandpa never spoke of the war and I was told not to bring it up. As such, even his children knew little of what Grandpa experienced. As I grew older I became more curious and a little more knowledgeable of war. I would ask my mom about Grandpa’s time during World War II, but as with the rest of the family, she knew little. As a young teenager my curiosity was

growing but I didn't know how to ask him, even though we had a close relationship. Then one day my mom & I were visiting my grandparents. Grandpa and I were sitting together and he brought up a couple experiences during the war. My mom and grandma looked over and were very surprised! For one, they never heard that from him before, and two, he had just decided to speak to me about it out of the blue. When my mom and I returned home, my mom talked to me. She was still surprised that Grandpa spoke to me about it and she encouraged me to talk to him again. She knew it was something special for him to talk to me and thought now might be the time my Grandpa would finally open up about his war time experiences. I became nervous, but excited, about our next visit to Grandpa's.

Unfortunately, shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with cancer and I was never able to get that alone time with him before he passed away - something I deeply regret - so many things we'll never know.

This is why I write this tribute to my Grandpa, PFC Norman J. Poshusta, US Army Co. L, 383rd Reg, 96th Infantry Division - for him and for his family. We miss you!

