

Richard E. Arnold
"A Sense of Duty" 05/17/2013

In June 1956, Richard E. Arnold moved from Tampa to Sarasota and started a Certified Public Accounting practice...Arnold and Company. He was an unassuming CPA who became a community and business leader in Sarasota County until his death in 1999.

This is the story of his heroism on behalf of all mankind during World War II.

Nearly seventy years ago, Arnold sailed from Southern England and headed across the channel to Omaha Beach as a 22 year old sergeant in the 83rd Infantry Division.

He described the experience in his autobiography, "As we approached Normandy there were those sheer, forbidding cliffs. All around us, to the horizon and beyond, were hundreds of other ships of the massive landing fleet. A storm rose out of nowhere and slashed at Omaha Beach and made life miserable for a week. On June 16, 1944, we relieved the 101st Airborne Division, which had jumped on D-Day. Our first major attack was in the hedgerows of Normandy, just south of the town of Carentan, on July 4, 1944. The fireworks were outstanding!" he said.

Within 3 days of being engaged in mortal combat, he distinguished himself and was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action. His citation describes his act of heroism thusly, Sergeant Arnold, as part of a small covering' force was assigned to hold a position on one flank of the line. This was vital for the security of the covering force. The enemy launched an attack attended by intense machine gun, mortar, and small arms fire, but were successfully repulsed. During the engagement, Sergeant Arnold was painfully wounded. When the attack was renewed Sergeant Arnold was again painfully wounded but despite great pain and loss of blood, continued to pour a steady stream of fire upon the enemy, turned the tide and prevented them from breaching the line.

The 83rd Division (approximately 15,000 men) fought in all five campaigns in Northern Europe: Normandy, Brittany, Ardennes (är'den), Rhineland and Central Europe. During these five campaigns the 83rd Division experienced 15,013 battle casualties and 25, 923 total replacements, captured 82,146 prisoners, and destroyed 480 tanks, 61 planes, 29 supply trains and 966 artillery pieces. It is unknown how many of the enemy was killed or wounded by the Division. Arnold was one of only a few front line combatants of his rifle company (approximately 250 men) to ENGAGE THE ENEMY and SURVIVE all five campaigns.

He told of the story surrounding another firefight. "There was a machine gun in the hedgerow in front of a tank, which had the men from our Company I penned down just across the road. I got an antitank rifle grenade ready to launch, and stood on top of my hedgerow until the German machine gun began firing again. When it opened fire I could detect its location from the tracer bullets leaving the muzzle. I scored a perfect hit and the machine gun disappeared in a cloud of black smoke." For this brave action, he was awarded the coveted French Croix de Guerre (kwa-duh-gare) medal for heroism.

Several months later he received the Bronze Star for action while relieving the 4th Division in Germany and installing a communication wire from the company command post to the battalion command post over open terrain and under direct observation and

resulting mortar and artillery fire from the enemy. The citation read, the courage, devotion to duty and coolness displayed by Sergeant Arnold merits highest praise.

Besides the Silver Star, Croix de Guerre and Bronze Star for heroic achievement, he was awarded the Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster and his battalion was awarded a unit citation for outstanding performance in the Hurtgen (hur-gen) Forest in December, 1944.

The Battle of Hurtgen Forest is the name given to the series of fierce battles fought between U.S. and German forces in the Hurtgen Forest, which became the longest single battle the U.S. Army has ever fought. The battles took place from 19 September 1944 to 10 February 1945, over barely 50 square miles located east of the Belgian-German border.

The Hurtgen Forest cost the U.S. 1st Army at least 24,000 killed, wounded, captured or missing in fighting. And, another 9,000 succumbed to the wet and cold with trench foot and respiratory diseases, for a total of 33,000 American casualties. German casualties were 28,000. Hurtgen was so costly that it has been called an Allied "defeat of the first magnitude."

Despite the conditions, the Third Battalion fought heroically against a fierce German army.

Excerpt-Third Battalion, 330th Infantry Unit Citation

Despite constant artillery, mortar and MG fire, the Third Battalion threw back daily counterattacks by numerically superior forces of enemy infantry supported by tanks and assault guns. During the four day period which saw six battalion commanders in command, due to wounds or death incurred in action, the battalion displayed its superb fighting spirit by refusing to allow itself to be defeated. Without food for three (3) days and without sufficient medical supplies to treat the ever increasing number of its own and enemy wounded, the battalion never lost its determination to succeed in the face of what appeared to be a desperate and hopeless situation.

During this period Arnold was captured by the Germans and held as a Prisoner of War. He escaped just before daylight the morning after he was captured.

The overarching message in his autobiography is summed up in this statement by Arnold: "I was the fifth child in a Christian family, all of whom respected law and order, worshiped God, and felt a sense of duty to our country...I did not wait to be drafted into service during World War II; I enlisted. I did not judge whether fighting a war was moral, or immoral. It was enough for me to fight the enemies of our country on their soil, rather than risk fighting on our own."

by Buddy Turman

May 1, 2013