

Woodrow Wilson Rasnick

By Dennis R. Rasnick



My father was Ralph Roland Rasnick. Dad came from a rather large family in Dickenson County, Virginia. This article is about one of his uncles, his mother's baby brother Woodrow. When I was a boy, I spent a lot of time in the mountains above and around Frying Pan Creek hunting and fishing with the men of our family. I have many wonderful memories of these times, especially the time spent with "Uncle Woody." Woody was a true American Military Hero. He had traveled to countries around the world and seen things unimaginable to most of us. A couple of months ago, Marie Fetzter ask me if I would write an article about Woodrow. The following is my attempt.

Woodrow Wilson Rasnick was born August 11, 1914 in Selton, Virginia. He was the youngest of the 11 children of Joseph H. and Ida Honaker Rasnick. Woodrow's sisters were Alpha, Nannie, Reba, Vie, Esther, Lou and Eddie. His older brothers were Tyler, Charlie and Grady. He attended Grade School at the one room Flint Gap School, and later three years of high school at Clintwood, Virginia. He joined the Civilian

Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

He joined Army on August 3, 1940 and was placed in the 21st Infantry, 24th Division and sent to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. He was there at 8:00 on the morning of Dec 7, 1941. In a newspaper interview fifty years later he remembered...

“I was in Company I of the 21st Infantry, Schoffield Barracks,” he said. “I wasn’t on duty that morning. I had gone in the bathroom to wash up for breakfast when I heard the first Japanese plane. I thought it was a practice attack. Then he heard the explosion and saw smoke coming up from the ground. When it was over, Hickam Field was a wreck. Everything in the barracks had been shot to pieces and casualties at the air base were massive.” After the attack subsided, Woody walked over to a Japanese plane, crashed in a pineapple field near the base. “The plane was covered with a kind of canvas. The canvas had blood all the way down it where the pilot caught a bullet in his head and bled on it.” He cut up the canvas in pieces and gave the scraps of blood soaked fabric to others to send home as a souvenir of what he realized would be a momentous day in history. “Somehow I knew I’d have plenty of chances to get more war souvenirs,” he recalled, “and I was sure right about that.” Woody received the Bronze Star for his actions during the attack. This was the first of many medals and citations he earned. While in the Pacific Islands he was awarded the Presidential Citation Battle of Midway Island and 2 Asiatic Pacific Campaign Stars.

He then went to the 16th Infantry, 1st Division (The Big Red One) as they Spearheaded the Invasion of North Africa near Oran on November 8, 1942. On July 7, 1943 they then Spearheaded Invasion of Sicily. For his actions on the Island of Sicily, he was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and his second Bronze Star.

He received his next Bronze Star for his actions on June 6, 1944 on Omaha Beach as the 1st Division Spearheaded the Normandy Invasion. In 1998, Woody went to see “Saving Private Ryan,” the Spielberg film that begins with the infantry soldiers going ashore on Omaha Beach. I asked Uncle Woody what he thought of the movie. “It was ok I guess, but it wasn’t the way I remember it.” I then asked him if he would tell me about that day. Woody always had an amazing memory, keen with detail. He recalled how well he slept the night before, what he had for breakfast, the names of most of the men that climbed into the landing craft with him that morning. He told me of being in the sixth craft in line going toward Omaha beach at 6 in the morning and watching as the first five were blown up in succession before his craft took

a direct hit. He was blown into the air, landing in the water of the English Channel where he was picked up, only to be taken back to another ship, put aboard another landing craft that took him ashore at 2 pm that same day. The Big Red One suffered 1,190 casualties at Normandy. This would be only the beginning, as they drove across France, ending up in the freezing Ardennes in what is now known as the “Battle of the Bulge.” The 1st rushed to the Ardennes and fought continuously for 42 days until the German advance was stopped and then turned into a retreat. The 1st Division then raced across Germany, crossed the Harz Mountains, and was in Czechoslovakia when the war in Europe ended. Sometime during this fighting Woodrow received the Silver Star. He returned to the States on June 9, 1945.

On November 6, 1946 he was then sent to Japan to supervise the first elections on Southern Island of Kayshu during the United States Army Occupation of that country. While there, in 1948, he married Machiko Saeki in Buppr City, Japan. They had one son, Donnie Eko Rasnick, who was born on March 26, 1949. When he left that country, he was unable to get permission to bring his new family back to the States, and they remained there. He said this was due to his not obtaining permission to marry from the military.

He remained in the military and served in Korea with the first unit sent to stop the Communist takeover in that country. Now with the 19th Infantry, 24th Division, he earned his fourth Bronze Star and his second Combat Infantry Badge in the defense of Puson. Then for action on August 17, 1950 at Maktong River he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for single handedly going up Ohang Hill and taking out several machine gun nests.

- **The Korean Presidential Citation**
- **The Combat Infantry Badge with Silver Star**
- **The American Presidential Citation - received four times**
- **The Philippine Presidential Citation**
- **The French and Belgian Ropes of War**
- **The Distinguished Service Cross**
- **The Bronze Star for Valor - received four times**
- **The American Defense Medal with Foreign Service bar**
- **The Good Conduct Medal**
- **The National Defense Medal**
- **The Asiatic-Pacific Medal with two campaign stars**
- **The African-European Medal with five campaign stars and Bronze Spearhead for two invasions**
- **The Korean War Campaign Medal with three campaign stars**
- **The United Nations Medal**

- **The Victory Medal**
- **Occupation Medals for serving the Armies of Occupation in Germany and Japan**