

MERCER MEMORIAL DAY 500 ~ HONOREES 2010



STAFF SERGEANT DON EICHELBERGER, trained as a water cooled 30 CAL machine gunner, shipped out to Bougainville, Northern Solomons to join the 164th Regiment of the Americal Division; one that ended up having the longest combat duty of any Army Division in the Pacific. His specialty was "intelligence reconnaissance combat" behind enemy lines. Don remembers reconnaissance missions lasting 10 days with little food and water. He suffered malaria, jungle rot, amoebic dysentery, hook worms and was hospitalized for tropical ulcers. He received a Bronze Star with V Device for actions taken when on patrol his platoon came upon 23 Japanese soldiers, eliminated them, and confiscated important military documents and weapons without losing one of their own. Another Bronze Star with Oakleaf was awarded him when his unit encountered, then eliminated 4 Japanese; then were pinned down by others. Don (Ike, as he was known) made his way successfully to bring reinforcements. Besides the Northern Solomons, he also served on the Southern Philippine Islands of Leyte, Cebu, Negros and in Japan. The Americal was the first entire division to occupy Japan. He

was credited with 3 combat missions, the last being a Philippine government action and received a medal from them. In 1992, fifty years later, Don was honored to lay a wreath at a monument dedication on Guadalcanal to honor the U.S. Marines who staged the first offensive American action of WW2. With oppressive heat and dense, foreboding jungle surrounding the spot, his mind went back to his small group of fighters that the jungle could not defeat long ago.



CORPORAL CLAIR HOUSTON, U.S.A., nicknamed Sam in the service of his country served with the 317th Engineer Battalion, H & S Company in Korea during the Cold War from 1953 to 1955. Though he did not serve in combat his two years in the United States Army had immeasurable effect on the remainder of his life. He modeled his life on the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage by serving his community, mainly through the Veteran of Foreign Wars Post 6345 to develop and support, behind the scenes, numerous programs for youth.



GORDON ZIMMERMAN wants people to know what it took to keep America free. He did more than his share, spending 22 months in combat; 59 days and nights in a foxhole at Anzio, Italy; throwing rocks at the Germans when he ran out of ammo; and getting shot in the leg. (The up side to that is that he got to move from infantry foot soldier to gunnery crewman on an anti-tank.) Corporal Zimmerman, A Company, 34th Infantry Division serving in the U.S.A fought in the battles of Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, PO Valley, Northern Apennines. He fought for a month straight at Cassino against Germans in concrete bunkers and gun pillboxes guarded by barbed wire, moats and land mines. At Anzio he was shelled continually by the Germans occupying the mountains above. For the soldiers who fought at Anzio winning simply meant coming out alive with a chance to risk your life another day in another violent battle. Young Gordon came home with not only a Purple Heart but also a bronze star with 4 battle stars attached and visions to last a lifetime of heinous German-inflicted atrocities. His comment on the experience reveals a lot about a soldier's life and attitude: "We had a great time there, but it was hell".



SERGEANT TOM GABIG, deceased, served his country in Tan Tru Village and the Mekong Delta region of Long An Province, South Vietnam. He was a gunner, squad leader and acting platoon sergeant, an infantryman with the 3rd Platoon, Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division. His job was to carry around a 27# machine gun and lay down a steady stream of supporting fire to draw enemy fire away from his platoon. He carried several hundred rounds of ammo in a wet land infested with mosquitos and temperatures 120 degrees. He slogged through knee-deep mud and rivers over-your-head-high. Engaging the enemy several times daily, facing an enemy up to 400 strong. The soldiers he fought with said of him: **"He was a leader by example. He had very little time off working both day and night. The stress of seeing men killed and injured plus sleep deprivation got to most of us but Tom always had a smile and a good word for you".** *"He was always quick to sacrifice his safety to see if others*

needed help" *"There was not a man he served with that did not like him. I never heard Gabe say a harsh word."* **"He lifted our spirits on bad days"** *"He had the respect of all the men around him"* *"Tom set the level of excellence bar very high. On top of all that he was extremely likeable"*, said his platoon sergeant. The day before he was to leave for R & R, leading a sweep of dangerous ground, while working to blow up the 7th booby trap an 8th went off wounding him from foot to waist. He screamed at his men to stay back and, limping, made the walk out immediately collapsing. Though severely wounded which converts into a trip home he elected to rejoin his unit. *"I cannot remember one episode when he grumbled, complained or "why-me-again" as he faced another helicopter ride into landing zones that awaited his careful footstep, putting his life on the line for us all. He was a man of honor, of duty, of courage and a man with blonde hair who wore black rimmed glasses and had a full-toothed smile."* A year later he returned home to a vastly ungrateful and, many times, hateful nation - a devastating reality to all who served selflessly for their country.

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