



San Diego Chapter 1 Member Biography

George Pappas

This is a story only of the general activities of my experience as a soldier in World War II. It does not fill in the horrors of infantry combat, or the drudgery of life while living under terrible conditions in mountains and swampland during the coldest winter on record, with driving rains and sleet and snow. It does not cover beatings or injuries.

I left my hometown, Midland, Michigan, to go to college at Michigan State. I was an engineer student. It was a time when we were at war with Germany, Italy and Japan. Many students were being drafted and others were joining the Army or Navy. An Army recruiter came to talk to engineer students with what we thought was a good deal. We would have basic combat training and then go to an engineer training camp. After completing the training we would go to O.C.S. (Officer Candidate School).

Everything went along as promised, 13 weeks of infantry training in Arkansas and then to the desert in California- Patton's pride and joy. After a few weeks in camp, we were sent home for a week and then reported to a camp in Virginia.



American Soldiers were having a rough time in Africa and of all things – we became replacements in infantry. General Patton said: "War is a killing business, you must spill the enemy's blood, or they will spill yours".

We landed in Casablanca, North Africa. I was to join Company E, 179th Regiment, 45th Division, The Thunderbirds.

Our first real combat was in the mountains in Italy. From Naples to Monte Casino, to the Loire Valley that was the road to Rome. The problem was that the mountains were like a fish spine and there were ranges of mountains and rivers to cross. Fortifications were on three lines before the Gustav line or Monte Casino.

In the month of November, it rained for twenty –seven days. The rocky slopes with rain were hard to deal with. It was extremely cold with sleet and snow. The Germans were always at the higher level and blasting away.

Food, water and ammunition had to be brought up by mules, to a certain point and then we had to get the supplies and carry them the rest of the way. They were really rugged mountains.

It was near Christmas time when our outfit was sent to a rest area in Piedmonte. It was the first time I had a shower except for the rain in three months! We even got some clean clothes for our mud-caked uniform and worn out shoes.

We did get hot meals instead of K-rations, but it was for a short time. We found out this was not a rest but a preparation for a January landing at Anzio.

We took positions and dug in near Apulia. After moving in against weak resistance, the Germans poured troops, tanks and artillery into the area. We expected a big counter attack because German air strikes, artillery and action became explosive.



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We had send combat missions and other mission to find what information we could get. On February 10, a major assault began. Forty Messersmitts bombed and strafed our position and then major artillery hit us.

My company and regiment was the main goal of the Germans. We were on the one main road that was usable because of the muck and mire of the swampland of Anzio.

After the War, I read in the 179th Regiment Book that after the artillery stopped-five waves of 500 men, 2500 total troops behind Tiger tanks; hit our position of a little over 200 men.

We held our position through the 17th of February. At the end of that day we only had 18 men left. American planes, artillery and Naval guns kept the Germans dug in. We were captured on February 18th, 1944 and we had only four men living. Three of us were wounded.

We had to go through the German lines. I had never seen so many dead soldiers. It was bad time for the Germans, as well as for us. The American artillery and air planes gave us a lot of trouble as we went into the German lines.

We finally sat down by a damaged building. I was humming, sort of in a trance, when a little German said: "Now you can sing – for you the war is over". Boy, how he was wrong.

Our first camp was a large, old, movie studio near Rome, Cinna Citta. About 2000 prisoners were there with limited food and poor sanitary conditions. The wounded were not treated and many became very ill with no medical care. In this camp there were prisoners from England and several other countries. It was a temporary camp and we were moved on March 10, 1944.

We arrived at Camp Laterina. I called it "Latrina". We were in our clothes – lice and bugs from the studio. We had no showers or soap or tooth paste or any of the ordinary things we were used to.

We were on a starvation diet. Breakfast – make believe black ersatz coffee. Lunch – watery soup. Dinner - a piece of black bread made of grain and sawdust, etc.

In three months at Camp Laterina, I had lost 75-80 pounds. When I got to Germany I weighed less than 100 lbs.

We were moved to a camp in Montova, Italy, where we were

put into box cars. Each was big enough for 40-50 people, but we had 95 in our car. It was very crowded and had only one little window for ventilation.

We went through Brenner Pass to Munich. The trip lasted seven days. We were placed in a rail yard. During the two days that we were locked into the cars, the Americans were bombing in the daytime and the British at Night. It was a miracle that we survived.

Our next move was to Stalag VIIa at Moosberg. We were sent to a working camp on June 14. It was an airbase near Memmingen. We worked on different details each day, loading or unloading trucks or digging air raid shelters.

American planes started to fly over the airbase. One day they were coming in low and we ran to an open field and hit the ground. We were lucky, the first bombs were anti-personnel. We got up and ran to the wooded area when the big bombs dropped. Not one American was killed of the 168 of us on that airbase. About 900 Germans were killed, and the next day I was on detail to load bodies and body parts on an wagon and went to town to the undertaker's. We made several trips.



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We were sent to a farm town –
Tussenhausen, on July 22, 1944.

Eighteen of us lived in a
whitewashed horse stall. Each of
us worked for a different farmer.
There are many stories about
events in Tussenhausen, some
good and some were terrible.

We were liberated on April 27,
1945. I was sent to the field
hospital and then to Camp Lucky
Strike, and then home.

After returning home, I resumed
my education, and earned my
doctorate. I worked for years as
an educator prior to my eventual
retirement.