

Post 171 Veterans - a Continuing Series

James Lee "Jim" Moore (April 4, 1924 - October 29, 2013)

By Jennifer Moore Shaffer

Jim, my Dad, was born in Broadford, Virginia. He was drafted by the U.S. Army at age 19 and served in World War II from 8 February 1943 to 27 October 1945. He served as PFC in the 88th Division (Blue Devils) 349th Anti-Tank Company. His awards include the European, African and Middle Eastern Theatre Ribbon with three Bronze Battle Stars, the Good Conduct Medal and the prestigious Combat Infantry Badge, which he earned for his expert marksmanship and rifle skills. He was most proud of the Bronze Star Medal which he was awarded in 2000 along with Ormie Rippeon, and Ray Luhn. These three guys received this honor many years later, although General Eisenhower had directed the award for all CIB winners. Thanks to the dedication and tenacity of Past Post Commander George Bolling they received this much deserved very high award. Dad was also a very proud Honorary Life Member of American Legion Post 171 and received the Distinguished Member Award posthumously.

I could never begin to express all that he saw, experienced and endured during his service, but here is a bit of it.

It's a well-known thing that WWII veterans don't typically talk about their experiences very much or very often. That was true about my Dad. He would tell us some of the funny things that happened or mischievous tales, but he kept most of the bad stuff to himself. I know he shared some of it with my Mom but there is a lot we will never know. He protected us from the horrific details. I do know that he was always very empathetic to anyone who was injured or sick.

One of our favorite stories was the time they were re-locating in the dark of night. The Captain called and Dad happened to be on the radio that night. The Captain asked over the radio where the men were. Dad said "Man, it's two o'clock in the morning, pitch black, I'm leading a mule and have one by the tail... how the hell should I know where we are?" to which the Captain yelled "who is this?" and the radio went dead. Dad also served as driver for Lieutenant Andrews of their unit. In the midst of other soldiers he was "Lieutenant", but when it was just the two of them, he was "Andy". That's where lots of his mischievous stories came from. It seems the Lieutenant enjoyed wine and women.

Dad would talk about driving trucks and jeeps through snow, mud and all kinds of rough terrain. He talked about moving supplies by mule train over mountains. He talked about taking shelter in barns or farmhouses, one time sleeping in the straw amongst the cows to try to keep warm. The thing I remember most is him talking about those mountains in Italy.

In October, I had the amazing opportunity to go to Italy with some friends. I was so excited because I was hoping to visit some places and see some monuments or memorials relating to WWII and maybe see where Dad had been in the war. I was pretty nervous about the flight over the Atlantic, but I kept thinking about how my Dad must have felt when he was off to Italy after his mountain training in Africa. They started from Naples on the southern coast of Italy and fought their way north all the way to Austria. He was only 19 and probably had never been

anywhere but Virginia, Maryland, Camp Howes for Basic Training and Ft. Sam Houston for Extended Training. Upon arrival in Naples, the 88th became the first draftee division to enter a combat zone in World War II.

My trip began in Bologna then headed south to Tuscany. Our home base for the week was Montecatini, in the heart of Tuscany. Along the way we drove through the Apennines Mountains. I know my Dad crossed over those mountains. They were the biggest mountains I've ever seen. The views were spectacular, and I found myself in awe of him and his comrades for having done what they did there.

It's ironic but also amazing that I happened to stay in Montecatini. We have photos of my Dad and his Army buddies standing and smiling on the streets of Montecatini. We guess they were on a rest break since they had the chance to take photos and SMILE. I stayed where he once stayed. I'm sure the town is a lot different now than when Dad was there but somehow I felt safe there.

On a day trip to Florence, we got to see the Arno River. My Dad had to cross the Arno during the war but I'm not sure exactly where. I wondered how deep it was and what it must have been like for them. Wherever we traveled through Tuscany we would see those mountains; very steep, high and big mountains. I couldn't imagine how they ever climbed them, let alone battled on them. How did they manage this difficult terrain? It is so amazing what they endured.

We also drove past the Florence American Cemetery, but unfortunately there was no time to stop because we were with a group tour. Rest assured, through the trees I could see the American flag flying high over the graves of our soldiers who paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

The last two days of our trip was to Rome. On the way we saw lots of old country farmhouses that were dilapidated or had big holes in the roof, and I wondered "was he here?" His Division (the 88th Blue Devils) was the first to enter the city of Rome in June 1944. The Italians now days highlight the ancient history of Rome, the Coliseum, Pantheon and such. The most significant thing I saw in Rome was the Tiber River, which the 88th Division also traversed.

Many years after the War ended, Dad and Mom attended several annual 88th Division reunions. He always looked forward to seeing all his Army comrades and enjoyed many good times with them through the years. They would tell stories about each other and a few of them spoke about how Dad saved them back in Italy. He had extraordinary hearing and often heard the Germans when no one else could. He would say "Come on boys, we gotta move."

I'm sure we must have crossed the Gustav Line or the Gothic Line somewhere, but things like that aren't marked on the Italian road signs. As found on www.armyhistory.org, "In 344 days of combat, the 88th Infantry Division lost 2,298 men killed in action and 9,225 men wounded. The Blue Devils proved that with rigorous training, teamwork, competent leadership, and fierce determination, an all-draftee division was more than capable of fighting well against a well-trained, well-equipped, and battle-hardened enemy. Even under the worst circumstances, the men of the 88th gave their all and wound up playing an integral part in the defeat of the German Army in Italy."

I searched and hoped to find something tangible to connect to my Dad's time in Italy, but now I know that it was more important for me to feel a speck of what he must have felt: overwhelmed, lost, tired, scared, hungry, but most of all wanting to go home. I could not be more proud or thankful to my Dad and all those he served with in World War II and the sacrifices they all made to preserve the freedoms we take for granted most of the time. I hope everyone who reads this will, from now on, show the greatest respect, admiration and appreciation to all our Veterans. They are nothing short of heroes.