



Karl O. Holliday

5-42

Captain, U.S. Army

Service # O-453965

561st Field Artillery Battalion

Entered the Service from: Iowa

Died: 13-Apr-1945

Buried at: Plot C Row 7 Grave 17

Netherlands American Cemetery

Margraten, Netherlands

Awards: Purple Heart

Hometown: Corydon, IA



CPT Karl O. Holliday
Battery Commander, HQ Battery, 561st Field Artillery Battalion
Killed in Action 13 April, 1945, near Klotz, Germany

My Dad was born in a farm house in rural Wayne County, Iowa on December 18, 1918. Known as "Bud" to his family, somewhere along the line in the Army, he picked up the name of "Hap." Having attended a one room school house until the 8th grade, he graduated from High School at Promise City, Iowa.

During his youth, my Dad lived on and worked the farm with his parents and siblings. The farm had been deeded to a Holliday by the United States Government in 1857. The Holliday family still owns this farm. Luckily, I spent a great deal of my own youth working the same farm as my Dad. After graduation from High School my Dad attended Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. He graduated with a degree in Commerce (now called Business Administration) in 1941, and was drafted into the Army following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. While at Drake, he was a member of Alpha Tau Omega social fraternity. He also was an athlete having played both football and basketball.

My Dad took his basic training at Ft. Bragg, N.C. and was eventually assigned to the Field Artillery at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. It was at Ft. Sill where he successfully completed Officers Candidate School and received his commission.

The 561st Field Artillery Battalion was organized in 1943 at Camp Joseph T. Robinson near Little Rock, Arkansas. He was one of the original officers forming the Battalion. During his tour of duty at Ft. Sill he met and married my Mother. I was born on September 1, 1943 while my Dad was stationed at Camp Robinson. The Battalion left Camp Robinson late in 1943, eventually sailing for Europe in January of 1944. I was five months old at the time. Unfortunately I have no memory of him.

The 561st landed at Utah Beach on June 29, 1944. From that point on the men of the 561st were continually involved in combat until the War ended on May 8, 1945. They were involved in five major campaigns, including the battles for Normandy, and Brest in France. From October of 1944 until December 16, 1944 the 561st was dug in just east of St. Vith, Belgium, near the village of Schlerbach. This was the exact spot where German Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt sent his Panzers to attack the American lines in what became the Battle of The Bulge.

The area is known as the Schnee Eifel. From the time the Battalion entered the Schnee Eifel in October of 1944 until December 16, 1944 my Dad and three other officers lived in a hole they had dug into the ground. Over this they had thrown a tarp, and lined their "home in the ground" with logs. The Schnee Eifel is heavily wooded hilly country.

The 561st Field Artillery Battalion was an Artillery Battalion consisting of five Batteries. Three of these Batteries were firing Batteries, with each firing Battery having four Guns. The Guns were 155 mm, known as "long toms." The barrel was 19 feet long. Each Gun weighed 9,595 lbs., and each Gun was pulled by a Prime Mover (a 6X6 truck weighing 43,570 lbs.). The projectile fired by these guns weighed 95 lbs. The muzzle velocity was 2,800 feet per second. The range was approximately 13 miles. The 561st was known as a "Bastard Battalion" in that it was not assigned to any particular division or unit. It was a Battalion which was built right into the system, meaning that it could pick up and move to provide artillery fire support to a division

whose own artillery might not have had enough fire power to get the job done. One of the veterans of the 561st told me that the men from the Battalion probably had a broader prospective of the War than other Battalions which had been assigned to a division.

On December 16, 1944, the day the Battle of The Bulge started, Battery C of the 561st was forced to use Direct Fire on the advancing German Panzers and troops. This meant that the men of the Battery could see the enemy from their firing position. The tubes (barrel) of each Gun was registered at 0, meaning they, respectively, had no elevation.

As the Battery Commander of Headquarters Battery, my Dad's job with the Battalion was to find housing for and to feed the men. He was in charge of the Battalion's Fire Direction Center, and also in charge of the Battalion's communication network. He also had the duty to make sure the Battery was secure from the enemy.

When I was in college I was contacted by several of my Dad's friends from the 561st. Although I lost my Dad to WW II, I have been fortunate to have known these men for the past 30 plus years. This group of comrades has held bi-annual reunions since 1948. I have been to most of them since 1970. I have become very good friends with many of them. I truly believe that there cannot be much in life which bonds people closer together than facing a common enemy. I have been the beneficiary of those friendships. It has been through my friendship with those men that I have really gotten to know my Dad.

Here is what some of them have said of him: He had a sense of humor which could carry the day." "He had no fear of the enemy." "His leadership and spirit served us well during our most fearful and trying times."

My Dad died on April 13, 1945. He was a member of an "advance party" comprised of about 15 American vehicles. The Colonel in charge of the "advance party" decided to bypass the American Infantry and to take the group further than was ordered. As the American vehicles approached a hill, German troops hiding on both sides of the road ambushed them with machine-gun and rifle fire. My Dad, and the other three men from his jeep jumped into a shallow ditch. My Dad and his First Sergeant both carried Thompson Submachine Guns. Both of them stood up and started firing at the enemy. Both were hit by fire from a German Burp Gun and killed. Some of the Americans at the rear of the column were able to get away. Those that were not killed were taken prisoner. One of my Dad's fellow Battery Commanders raised his hands to surrender and a German soldier walked up to him and shot him in the arm. Today this man is my good friend.

I have many artifacts from the 561st Field Artillery Battalion, as well as from my Dad. However, perhaps the most prized possession I own is a letter he wrote to me on my first birthday, September 1, 1944. Among the things he said was: "I've been so terrible lonely my son. I've been away for a long time. We've had a job to do so that little boys can grow up in a free country. The job is almost finished."

My Dad had a sense of humor. He had spirit. He had dignity, honor and he was a terrific leader. I've missed him all of my life in so many ways. I always will. Yet, I am also very proud of him, as well as all of the men and women this country produced to fight that horrible War. My children know about him, and my grandchildren will also, and on down the line. All of them will not only know about him, they will also know about all of the others. We are where we are today because of them. May they all rest in peace. Bob Holliday

