

CLARENCE FREDEEN



Clarence N. Fredeen was working on the family farm near Grove City Minnesota when he was drafted into the US Army on 6 July 1943. Having had some experience working on the machinery at the farm, Fredeen hoped to be serving his Army time in the Army Air Corps, since men with mechanical experience many times were sent to the Air Corps.

He was sent to Camp Fannin Texas for Basic Training. Camp Fannin was a new installation prepared originally for training Air Corps personnel, but after its construction it was deemed more useful to train replacement Infantry personnel. With the new course of training at Fannin, Clarence realized that he would not get to serve in the Air Corps.

For Fredeen, the physical work of basic wasn't that difficult. Having grown up as a farm kid, the exercises that he had to do were not any more difficult than the day to day work at the farm. Even the military discipline that he was exposed to didn't bother him too much. He did recall one instance when he had his duffel bag laid out for inspection, thinking he did a pretty good job. When the Drill Instructor came around to look over his stuff, he picked it up and tore it all apart. The way Clarence looked at it, however, was that their job was to find fault, even if what he had would have been acceptable.

Most of basic training Clarence enjoyed, but some things were a bit stressful. Learning to fire and maintain all of the different rifles and other weapons was actually kind of fun. When it came to throwing live hand grenades, however, that experience shook them up some. They realized the consequences if they did something wrong.

Sometime near the end of his training, Fredeen recalls getting up one morning, having breakfast and then training all day. After training, they went to have a full diner and were ordered to get their gear to prepare for a night march. Clarence and the other men set out on a 22 mile march with full packs. He remembers watching numerous men fall out, passing out from the task. They returned to the base in time for breakfast the following morning.

After Fredeen completed basic he was sent to Fort Ord California. In California Clarence continued to train. Here they ran obstacle courses, went on more marches, and did more physical training. One thing Clarence remembers vividly is once after a heavy rain they had to crawl through a muddy field, with machine gun fire overhead. He notes, "We were such a mess when we got out of there." They were covered from head to toe in mud.

Fredeen spent a couple months in California before he was sent to Hawaii. He arrived in Hawaii in March 1944. While in Hawaii, Clarence got his unit assignment. Clarence was assigned to L Company, 106th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division, in a Machine Gun Section.

In Hawaii, Clarence trained with the other men in his unit for when they would be sent into combat. The 27th Division had been stationed in Hawaii serving security for the island. When Fredeen arrived, the division knew that soon they would be sent into combat.

They did Jungle training, and tried to become climatized for the tropical environments that they would be fighting in. Clarence also recalled the amphibious assault training that they did on the north side of the island.



Patch of the 27th Infantry Division

They would load up into landing craft, fully loaded with gear like they would in battle. When the door came down on the landing craft they would storm the beach, practicing the assault tactics they would use in battle. After they had "taken" the area, they would load back up into the landing craft and do it all again. Clarence cannot recall exactly how many times they did this exercise, but he does remember that it was plenty of times.

After a few months on Hawaii, they received orders to ship out overseas. Fredeen remembers coming up to a huge luxury liner that would be transporting them overseas and thinking, "No way we'll get seasick on this!" but it didn't take long on board before they were. One guy would get sick, and set the tone for the rest of them

American military high commanders planned for multiple assaults to take the Marianas Islands. The plan was made up of three plans, the taking of Saipan, followed immediately by Tinian, while another force would take Guam.

The 27th Division was set to be the reserve force for the operations, and used at which ever of the locations they were most needed. When they set sail, the unit had 19 operational plans for its employment, and gained three more while enroute. No one knew exactly where they would be used, but all units were prepared. The priority of the attacks would be Saipan, Tinian, then Guam.

On 15 June 1944, members of the US Marine Corps Fifth Amphibious Corps charged ashore on Saipan. Within 24 hours the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions has established a beachhead, but at a relatively high cost. Clarence and the 27th would be used at Saipan.

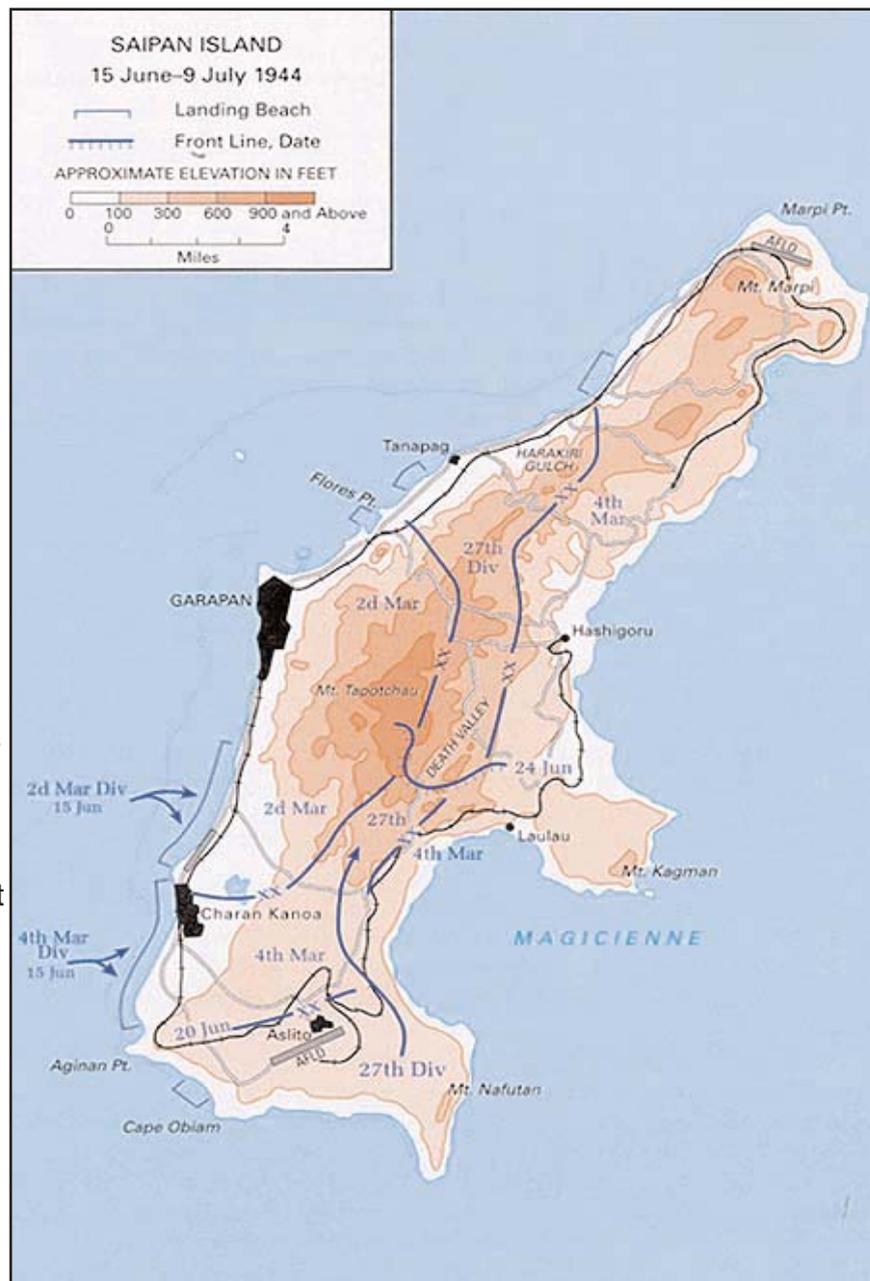
Enemy forces on the island were estimated to be at around 30,000 troops. The island was 13 miles long, and 5 1/2 miles wide, with a mountain range running down the middle. The area was heavily wooded and rugged, with caves and valleys. The main industry on Saipan was Sugar Cane. The Cane fields were large and plentiful, which could cause a major problem for the advancing soldiers.

Cane fields are extremely flammable. If a field caught on fire when soldiers were in the middle of it, they couldn't run fast enough to get out of it. Plus the smoke from the burning plants would make the men collapse before they could get very far. As a precaution, American personnel dropped incendiary explosives on the fields on the island to try to burn them down before Marines and Soldiers could get caught in them.

Shortly after noon on 16 June, Clarence and the 27th Division received orders to proceed to Blue Beach to disembark. Units of the 27th proceeded to prepare, and some began the journey to the beaches. Clarence's unit, the 106th Infantry, was not part of the early units of the 27th Division to go. Clarence didn't go onto Saipan until 20 June, 1944.

Clarence loaded on the landing craft, and began moving towards shore. He remembers that it seemed to take a long time to reach shore. Part of the reason it seemed like such a long time to get there he felt probably had to do with the uncertainty of what would happen once they got there. When they landed, they didn't receive any fire. Things were essentially calm. It would have seemed that the battle was all but over, but that didn't last.

That first night, they started to take enemy fire. Clarence recalled to the West Central Tribune, "The first night one guy was hit in the same fox hole I was in." Fredeen tells of going to sleep one night, and noticing a huge bright light while he was sleeping that awakened him. It turned out that a mortar round went off next to him. Clarence could reach out of his hole right into the crater. Because of laying in his hole, the blast went over him. If he had dug his foxhole 3 feet closer, the shell would have landed right on top of him..





On 22 June, Clarence and his unit moved to an area just south of the crest of Mount Tapotchau. In this area, the terrain was extremely rough and difficult to pass or advance. This area was the 4th Marine Division sector of operations. Operational briefings and situational reports took place, and just before darkness, they were informed of their task for the next day.

During the night, things were mostly quiet, with some heavy shelling coming in at times. Clarence and the men of L company were up early, ate a cold breakfast, and were on the move by 0530. L company was in the lead of this assault. Their mission was to pass through the base of Mount Tapotchau, through a low plateau called, "Death Valley". The push brought them through high, heavy grass strewn with many boulders, through a cane field and into a grassy area.

By getting to the grassy area however, this left them open to Japanese fire from Mount Tapotchau to the left front, and a ridge of hills called, "Purple Heart Ridge" to the right rear. Soon, they became pinned down in the valley. They received heavy fire from both Mount Tapotchau, Purple Heart Ridge, and a location of trees to their left. The Japanese could be seen running along the side of the mountain, in and out of caves putting fire down on Clarence and the other Americans. L Company was going into action with around 200.

The plan was for L company to proceed forward then cut left to meet K company, and together they were to build a line before proceeding to the objective across the clearing area. As they moved forward, in an attempt to meet up with K company, that is when the Japanese started to open up on them.

As they pushed forward, they came across one Japanese ammunition dump that was in flames, and the shells, grenades and mines in it began to explode. This caused an added hazard to the men beyond the regular fire they were receiving from the Japanese.

As they pushed forward, they had to move in rushes, only a couple of men at a time. It made for slow progress. Slowly, they moved closer and closer to their objective of the link up with K company.

The link up had taken so much time of the day, that it was decided that they would advance no further that night. A perimeter was formed, and Clarence and his Machine Gun section had hunkered down next to a captured Japanese ammunition stores area. Shortly, they came under enemy mortar fire.

After darkness fell on them, the Japanese launched a tank attack on the American positions. because of how dark it was, the attack wasn't discovered until the tanks were nearly at their lines. Because the attack wasn't discovered early enough, that tank slipped through the lines, but the remaining 5 tanks were knocked out.

The one that got through caused some of the worst damage to the American lines. One of its shells landed in the ammunition stores area, and the whole ammo dump began exploding. This was the ammo dump that Clarence was positioned by.

The explosion of the dump created major confusion. As it exploded, it lit up the area, and the Japanese from the cliffs and mountain started to throw everything they had down on the American positions. Clarence and the men in his Machine Gun section were forced to move from the explosion. They were to pull back, and go to the left. Instead, they went to the right, and put themselves right in front of the other American troops.

They yelled the password, to let the Americans know they were friendlies, but it wasn't heard, and mistaking them for Japanese, they were pummeled by friendly fire. After the soldiers emptied their rifles, they heard the cries of the password as Americans.

It was during this attack that Clarence was hit in the shoulder by either a Japanese mortar or American hand grenade. Although wounded, it did not deter Clarence from the battle at hand.

In all the confusion of that night, he heard cries from a wounded soldier for help. Fredeen recognized the voice, and thought he couldn't just leave him there. He pleaded with the others to go with him to get the wounded man. The wounded man had been hit in the legs and was pinned down between the American and Japanese positions.

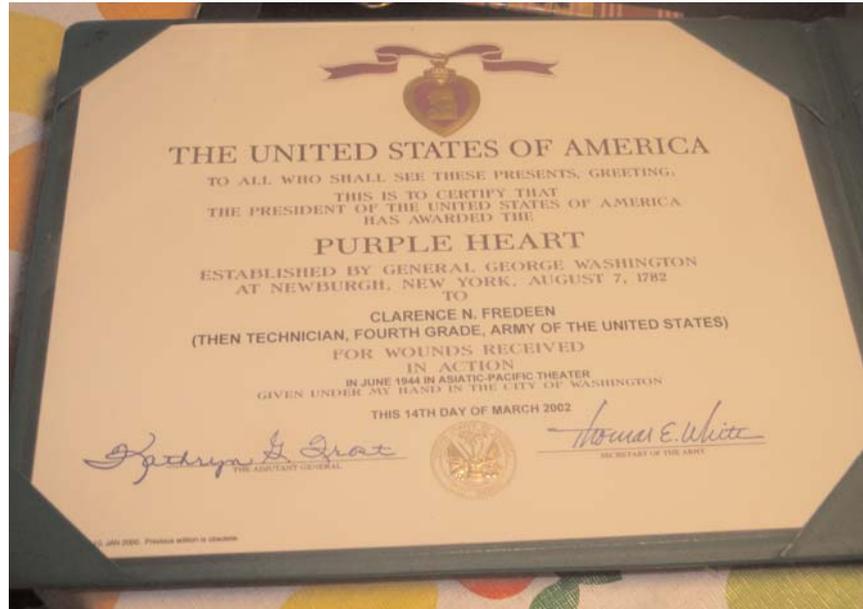
Clarence was planning to go it alone to help the man when commander of one of the units came along and ordered a couple of others to go with him. Clarence took off his jacket, and they used it for a litter to carry out the wounded man. Once the soldier was back to safety, he was brought out for medical treatment, and Fredeen never saw him again. The following morning, they found 3 dead GI's near where the wounded man was located.

At 0800 on the morning of 24 June, Clarence's company had orders to proceed to their right front, with the help of 3 tanks. When the time came, and the tanks didn't show, L Company moved out anyway. Slowly, they moved forward taking sporadic fire here and there.

While taking a position on point, one of the soldiers climbed over some rocks to see what was on the other side, and landed in the "laps" of five Japanese soldiers. The man, stunned, shot and killed three of the Japs, and dropped a grenade before taking off back over the rocks. Clarence and the rest of L Company began to fire on the enemy placement, and began to receive fire in return.

Enemy positions from in front of them along the cliffs of the mountains began to open up on them. Things looked rough, until tanks pulled up behind them in support. The tanks began to fire at each enemy emplacement it could find, but with so many Japanese positions, they began becoming disabled too.

Soon, Clarence's Company commander was notified that they were to hold their positions until relieved. They had taken tremendous losses over the past day and a half, and were nearing ineffective status. The entire third Battalion was set to be relieved.



K Company, which fought along side L Company (Clarence's company), was told they needed to be sent in to the fight again. The Battalion Commander is noted to have apologized to the commander of Company K about having to send them back in. The Company Commander is attributed to say, "Don't apologize, I know how it is." The he straightened out his hand saying, "So long, Hi (Battalion Commander). It's damned nice knowing you." Fifteen minutes later that company commander was dead, along with seventeen others from the company. It is documented that there were an even 100 casualties in the 2 1/2 hours of fighting in the battalion that morning.

During the push through Death Valley, it became evident that a continued frontal attack without knocking the Japanese out and off the mountain and cliff positions around them would continue to only produce heavy losses. The plan was made to go around the right flank to the eastern ridge from the side and isolate these cliff positions. At 0620 on 25 June the Third Battalion of the 106th Infantry began to move out. L Company was in the lead of the Third Battalion. The attempt was stalled by heavy enemy resistance. First Battalion, in the lead, suffered heavy casualties. Later, a change of plans put the Third Battalion on a night bivouac at the foot of Death Valley.

At 0600 on June 26, Third Battalion's L Company with Clarence, moved out over the rugged terrain. Using patrols, they slowly moved forward trying to take the ground needed to take the island. Soon, one of the patrols ran into enemy resistance, which turned out to be a sizable force. The ensuing battle, decimated L Company. In a period of ten minutes, one Platoon lost six men killed, and another 17 were wounded and evacuated. By 1600 on 26 June, L Company had to be taken off the line, and relieved by K company.

Around this time, Clarence finally decided to go have his shoulder wound checked out from the night of 23 June. He had taken a hit from a Japanese mortar round or grenade. While being treated for his wound, some other health concerns arose. After his recovery, Clarence was transferred to the Ammunition Company, 612th Ordinance.

By the time that the Third Battalion was taken off the line on 28 June, it was found that the Battalion only had around 99 men left in fighting condition. Clarence's Company, which started out with nearly 200 men on 20 June, was down to only about 60 men left alive.

In the fighting of Death Valley, over the five days they fought, the third battalion had lost its Battalion Commander, Battalion S-2, and all of its Company commander except for one. By the time it was said and done, L Company had the most amount of men left.

Finally, on 10 July 1944, the battle for Saipan ended and the Island came under American control. Clarence and the rest of his unit was sent to New Hebrides.



Clarence Fredeen's Dress Uniform, donated June 2007.

He was then sent to Guadalcanal and then on to the Russell Islands. After being on the Russell Islands for a while they went back to Guadalcanal, and on to the Philippines at Cebu. The 612th was then sent to Okida Japan, they were the first troops to land on the Northern Island.

In early 1946, Clarence boarded a train for Yokahama Japan where he caught a transport ship home. He arrived back in the US on 3 February, 1946. He was sent to Camp McCoy Wisconsin where he was discharged from the Army as a Tech Sergeant on 26 February 1946. He returned home to Minnesota and put the war behind him.

Due to the nature of his wound, and the situation of the combat that Clarence was in during the time, he was never awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds during the war. In the late 1990's Clarence decided to fill out paperwork for the Purple Heart to help achieve a higher priority level at the Veteran's Administration Hospital. Nothing came of the request until after Clarence worked with Senator Paul Wellstone's office to try to find out what was going on. Within a few months, Clarence received the Purple Heart, World War II Victory Medal, and the Bronze Star Medal, in March 2002.



On 9 June 2007, Clarence attended the dedication of the Minnesota WWII Veteran's Memorial in St. Paul. Clarence and the other veterans in attendance were given the above Medallion.

Perspective

West Central Tribune — Willmar, Minn.

Thursday, May 23, 2002 C1



New honor for old vet



New London man gets medals 58 years after battle

By Carolyn Lange
Staff Writer

Until just recently, Clarence Fredeen hadn't talked much about his stint in the U.S. Army and involvement in the deadly invasion of Saipan during World War II. A delivery in the U.S. mail last month changed that.

Fifty-eight years after dragging a wounded comrade from the middle of enemy and friendly fire — even though he himself was wounded — the 79-year-old Fredeen has received the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and the WWII Victory Medal.

The medals arrived in the mail in a padded, nondescript envelope long after Fredeen had given up hope of receiving the Purple Heart, which he'd applied for in order to increase his medical care benefits.

Seeing the Bronze Star, which is given for heroic and meritorious service, surprised Fredeen immensely and has opened a flood-gate of memories and stories as vivid as today.

Drafted at 19

At 19, Fredeen was older than most high school juniors. He'd missed a few years of school while helping his father on their Dassel farm, but was in school when he received his draft notice in the spring of 1944.

After being sent to camps in Texas, California and Hawaii, Fredeen was sent to Saipan where American troops battled Japanese soldiers in an invasion with heavy casualties to both sides.

"It was pretty rough," said Fredeen.

Of the nearly 200 men in his company, just 62 survived.

"The first night one guy was hit in the same fox hole I was in," he said. "The next day three guys were killed right beside me."

While it's difficult to confirm exact numbers, Fredeen said he's read reports that 32,000 Japanese soldiers were killed on Saipan. Nearly 4,000 American soldiers died.

Wounded hero

The day Fredeen was wounded, and helped another wounded soldier get to safety, was a day of confusion.

It was in the middle of the night — pitch black — when his machine gun section had hunkered down in fox holes near Japanese ammunition stores. They were under-going heavy enemy fire when a pile of ammunition was hit and started exploding.

The group of a half-dozen soldiers should've retreated to the rear, said Fredeen. But in the confusion they veered to the left and put themselves directly in front of other American troops who mistook them for Japanese soldiers.

"It was pretty rough... The first night one guy was hit in the same fox hole I was in... The next day three guys were killed right beside me."

They were pummeled by friendly fire. "We knew we were being shot at by our own guys," he said. I didn't think it was too friendly."

They had yelled the password to identify themselves but the soldiers didn't hear them until they'd emptied their rifles."

Three in his group were killed and two were wounded. Fredeen had shrapnel in his soldier, either from an American hand-grenade or Japanese mortar.

As the fighting continued, Fredeen said he heard a soldier call for help. He recognized the voice as someone he'd known during training. The soldier had been hit in both legs and was caught in the middle between American and Japanese troops.

"I just couldn't see leaving him there," said Fredeen, who pleaded with others to go with him to retrieve the soldier. "But they wouldn't budge."

Fredeen was ready to go by himself when a commander ordered a couple other soldiers to help with the rescue. Using Fredeen's jacket as a stretcher, they carried the man to safety. Fredeen never saw the man again.

It wasn't until a day or two later that Fredeen sought medical care for his own wounds.

Even though the soldiers who fired at them never apologized and didn't help the wounded, Fredeen said he doesn't blame them for shooting. "I would've done the same thing," he said. "There were no hard feelings there."

Painful memories

Despite the passage of time, Fredeen said he can conjure up the sounds and smell — especially the smell — on the island that hid thousands of dead bodies.

"There were bodies everywhere," he said. Some had just been shot. Some had been reduced to skeletons.

Some of the memories haunt him too much.

One day, while crossing a shallow stream, a soldier saw movement in the water and reeds, and opened fire.

What they found was a young woman, in her 20s, shot dead. In the water were two children, a boy and a girl, wounded.

"I held that little boy until medics arrived," said Fredeen. "That bothers me to this day."

He said he could tell stories for hours, but is afraid some may be too horrible to hear.

Trying to forget the bad memories, he said, "is too hard to do."

Seeking the Heart

When Fredeen was discharged in 1946, he returned to Minnesota. He never thought about applying for the Purple Heart, which is given to military personnel who suffer injuries.

"I was just like everybody else. I just wanted to keep the war," he said.

It was nearly three years ago that he'd filled out the paperwork for the Purple Heart. He was encouraged to do so by a friend, a higher level of priority to obtain medical benefits at the Veterans Administration Hospital in St. Cloud.

The survey got a response and someone on records of his wounds, very "long gone."

But his medals, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the WWII Victory Medal, were in the office to try to get them back to him. He had to look in the newspaper to find out how to get them back.

He was shocked when he saw the other two medals. Apparently, when Fredeen's name was submitted for the Purple Heart, a medal on his activities in Saipan was also discovered and it was awarded by a former post the medals he should've received shortly after discharge.



"I just couldn't see leaving him there."
— Clarence Fredeen
World War II veteran

Fredeen/Pep CF

West Central Tribune — Willmar, Minn.



Clarence Fredeen, 79, served in the U.S. Army from 1944-46, fighting in the Pacific arena. He was just recently awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and WWII Victory Medal. He received the medals 58 years after earning them during the invasion of Saipan in 1944.

Fredeen: WWII veteran

Continued from C1

During a ceremony last week at the Spicer American Legion, where Fredeen is a member, the Legion commander pinned the medals on Fredeen and read the citations for the honors.

His family, including relatives from California and Arizona, were there to see it. Fredeen said his family knew he'd been in WWII, but that was about it. They didn't know about the life and death he experienced during the war, or about the day he helped save another soldier on Saipan.

Now they know. After being silent for 58 years, Fredeen said he's decided it might be OK to start telling his stories, even the ones too difficult to hear.



Clarence Fredeen
He said other war veterans should do the same. "Everyone should tell their full story," he said.



Tribune photo by Bill Zimmet
Clarence Fredeen, left, is officially awarded his three medals by Post Commander Mike Koetter at the Henderson-Lewis American Legion Post 545 in Spicer.

West Central Tribune newspaper article about Clarence's journey in getting his long overdue medals.