

LUVERNE OSTBY



Luverne Ostby was born on 23 July 1922 and was raised in rural Minnesota. He left for military service in September 1941. After being sworn in at Fort Snelling, he was sent to Camp Claibourne Louisiana for his basic training.

Early on in his training at Camp Claibourne he was called aside and confronted by an officer that asked him if he spoke Norwegian, upon which his reply was yes. The officer asked "Why don't you answer in Norwegian?" and pointed to a large tent instructing him to go there. Inside was a tent full of Norwegian speaking soldiers including a neighbor, Bob Stay. The group was sent to Camp Ripley Minnesota to begin training.

Ostby was chosen to become a part of the 99th Battalion separate, a unit specifically made up of soldiers able to speak Norwegian. The plan was for the unit to help with the Norwegian Occupation Code Named PLOUGH. Four objectives were expected for be obtained in this mission: first to eliminate Norway as an economic asset for Germany, second, force Germany to keep large numbers of troops on occupation duty in Norway and away from other active fronts, third, limit the ability of German troops in Norway to attack allied convoys transporting to the Russian port of Murmansk, and fourth, prepare for the future occupation of Norway, and create a link through Norway to Russia.

In December 1942, the battalion including Luverne was transferred to Camp Hale Colorado. They were expected to receive extensive winter training and Ostby was issued skis for training. Shortly after being issued them, he had to turn them back in. He never even wore them.

After the snow melted in the spring of 1943, they began training on rock climbing. On Easter Sunday 1943, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt personally reviewed the Battalion. In the spring of 1943, it was determined that the possibility of a Norwegian invasion was not possible. The invasion of Europe was determined to be better coming farther south, in France. About 100 men from the battalion were recruited to form OSS teams to help with the Norwegian resistance and conduct unconventional warfare operations.

On 24 August 1943, they received orders to move to New York by train arriving in Camp Shanks to await being shipped to Europe. They boarded the SS Mexico, a steamship, and departed for Europe on 5 September 1943.

Luverne and the battalion arrived in Scotland on 16 September and boarded trains for the 16 hour ride to Perhan Downs Camp, in the Tidworth area of Wiltshire England. They began training and preparing for the eventual invasion of Europe.



Patch of the 99th Infantry Battalion separate

In January 1944 they moved to a new site at Glenusk Park in Wales where they continued with more mountain training. On 1 May they moved again to Herford England. Luverne remembers during this time before the invasion receiving orders to begin “waterproofing” their jeeps to prepare to cross the English Channel. For that they installed extensions to the exhaust system to bring it above the waterline, and coating all mechanical and engine parts with a waterproofing agent to protect against the salt water. Ostby takes pride in the fact that his jeep was one of the few that continued to work after the landing on the beach.

On 17 June 1944, eleven days after the initial assault on the Normandy Beaches, Luverne and the 99th Battalion boarded a ship for crossing the English Channel. Due to the poor weather, the beach head waters were too violent to land. The men spent days on the ship waiting, almost all became seasick. They arrived in sight of Omaha beach and were transferred to a Landing Craft for the final trek to Normandy on 21 June.

Luverne drove his Jeep off the Landing Craft into about 8 feet of water. The vehicle stayed a float for a short time before finally sinking in the channel. Luverne sat on the back of the seat while the waves from the channel slowly pushed the jeep forward until he could get enough traction to drive onto the dry ground.

As soon as they landed, the jeeps would need to be stripped of their “waterproofing” and prepared for battle.



Jeeps loaded on a Landing Craft for the landing at Omaha Beach

Most of the heavy fighting was done by the time the men of the 99th landed, but they still sustained artillery shelling from the retreating German Army while on the beach. Luverne says that the beach was strewn with broken and burned equipment, and dead soldiers.

The battalion was attached to the battle stricken 1st Army. Near Cherbourg France Luverne encountered his first tastes of combat. Although the landing force had taken the city and moved on, there was still much resistance there. A three day battle ensued before the men of the 99th defeated the Germans.



After fighting in Cherbourg, Luverne and his unit pushed inland in a southerly direction, continuing to meet and fight the Germans. Near Cherbourg, Ostby recalls seeing German 90mm gun emplacements aimed at the English coast. These guns were fully capable of reaching England, but it appeared that they never had the chance to use them. He recalls them as a awesome sight and with field glasses, could view the English coastline from this position.

Luverne traveled the distance of about 50 miles meeting sporadic resistance all the way to Caen France. In July they engaged the Germans near Hau de Haut, where they stayed for some time fighting and even continuing in training exercises. They conducted rear area security operations with the 759th Light Tank Battalion.

In the middle of August 1944, Ostby was attached to the 2nd Armored Division along with the rest of the Battalion. They battled through Toreuvre, Beit, and Cesseville, gaining praise from the 2nd Armored's commander as the only Infantry unit that they couldn't keep up with. On 25 August, they were engaged in heavy German resistance near Elbeuf on the Seine river. This location was important to the Germans as it was one of only two locations for the retreating Germans to cross the Seine.

Through September Luverne and his unit continued to fight with the 2nd Armored Division and saw heavy combat near Maastricht Holland and into Belgium. They were attached to the 30th Infantry Division in mid October and were assigned to attack Wurzen Germany to cut off the German retreat out of Aachean. They served as the 1st Army's rear reserve for defense against any German airborne operations.

On 16 December 1944, Germany launched it's offensive in the Ardennes known as the "Battle of the Bulge". The 99th was positioned around the town of Malmedy. A German unit commanded by SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny launched a mission to pose his men as American soldiers and have them infiltrate American positions to cause as much damage and confusion as possible.

Skorzeny's plan failed, but it did have an effect on the 99th Battalion. Many of the men of the 99th were direct immigrants from Norway and spoke poor English. In the confusion of arresting the German infiltrators, some of the men of the 99th were also arrested because they were thought to be the enemy due to how poorly they spoke English.

On 21 December 1944, at around 10:30 pm German Panzer Brigade 150 led by Skorzeny attacked the 99th Battalion's position. For eleven days the battle raged in what Luverne described as mud, snow, and extreme cold in what was one of the worst winters in German history. Heavy casualties were sustained on both sides, but due to the defensive efforts of the 99th battalion, Skorzeny's attack failed. Ostby says that thousands of Germans surrendered and were taken prisoner. He was on the very edge of the German lines near Leige within a half mile from the breakthrough when the Germans finally surrendered.

After the defeat of the Germans at the Battle of the Bulge, Luverne and the men of the 99th were sent to Tilff Belgium for some time for R & R (Rest and Relaxation). On 22 January, Ostby and the 99th loaded into French 40 & 8 railroad boxcars for the 72 hours ride to Barneville, near Normandy, where the war had started for them months before. Here they were reinforced, and rolled into a new unit, the 474th Infantry Regiment. They also received a new directive for their operations in the war. They were directed to move out and round up passed by German units, clear out hiding Nazis and demilitarize the civilian population.

Along the way they met up with Patton's Third Army near Aachen Germany. There was a huge celebration amongst the men. Luverne recalls the men drinking German beer, but they soon determined that it wasn't to their liking. Eventually they found a stock of Vodka, and continued their celebration. Vodka was new to most of the men, and many became sick from it.

In Aachen, Luverne lost his friend Bob Stay during a sniper attack. From a nearby burned out factory building, a sniper fired into a group of medics killing Stay. Luverne and a number of other men began firing at the window, silencing the sniper.

Luverne continued in their push toward Berlin. He witnessed companies of German Prisoners and civilian refugees all along his way. He also saw many of our own American POWs being liberated as well as the prisoners from the Concentration Camps. He says it was a terrible sight to see along the road, "eyes sunken into faceless heads, legs the size of a woman's arm...looking like walking skeletons."

Luverne came close enough to see the outskirts of the city of Berlin when it was decided by the High Command that the Russians would be the ones to enter the city. The men of the 99th also had the task of transporting Nazi gold and stolen art treasures from the Kaiseroda salt mines in Merker Germany to the Reichsbank in Frankfurt. Total retrieved items were valued at around 2.1 Billion dollars.

On 7 May 1945 Germany, defeated, surrendered to the Allies. The war in Europe was all but over. Luverne and the 99th Battalion received orders that they would be going to Norway to assist in the disarming and demobilization of Germany's 300,000 man army there. They headed back to the coast, through Luxembourg for LeHavre France. They spent some time there preparing before departing for Oslo Norway.

They were garrisoned in Camp Smedstad, a log cabin camp just outside of Oslo. Luverne states that there were still some enemy forces to be cleaned out, and there were a few skirmishes, but he did not have to participate in any of them.

Although the 99th Battalion received some replacements during their time in battle, a majority of the men in the battalion, like Ostby, had relatives in Norway that they wanted to look up.

Still being on active duty, but a generous leave and pass policy was allowed, Luverne took his time to meet up with many of his relatives that he had never met. He met many cousins, uncles and other relatives. He says that they were thrilled to meet a relative from America. He also met his grandfather's brother for the first time. The man's memory was impaired, but he could still be out and about. Luverne first saw him from a distance. In the pasture working with his bull. Luverne was recognized as an Ostby even though the man suffered from memory loss. The man's son served in the Swedish underground resistance throughout the war.

At the US Embassy in Oslo, Luverne was told that a man thought to be his nephew was working as a conductor on the railroad. The depot was nearby, and Luverne thought that he might find the man waiting there before leaving for duty on the train's return trip. He found the man asleep like he was told he might be, and woke him up. The man, bleary eyed and startled awake looked at him and said, "You must be Uncle Erick's son." Luverne said "No, I am his grandson."

Luverne met up with many of his relatives and word about him spread quickly through the family tree. He said that he spent many weekends at their homes and was treated to much fine Norwegian cooking and Norwegian hospitality.

Luverne and the entire 99th battalion left Oslo on 16 October 1945, and boarded the SS Bienville to set sail for the United States. They arrived in Boston on 1 November and they were sent to Camp Miles Standish where the battalion was demobilized on 2 November. Luverne traveled to Camp McCoy Wisconsin in December where he was discharged as a Private First Class one week before Christmas, 1945.

D-Day veterans honored

Armond Nelson received the Normandy Medal of the Jubilee of Liberty last Wednesday at the Benson VFW Post 1403.

Three other veterans awarded the medal were present at the ceremony: Luverne Ostby, Orin Ellingson and Bob "Peel" Johnson.

The medal was minted at the direction of the Regional Council of

Normandy and the Governor of Normandy. It was presented to those D-Day veterans who returned to France for the 50th anniversary of the landing June 6, 1944. The governor of the Normandy Region later authorized that the medal to be presented to Normandy veterans who were unable to attend the 50th anniversary ceremony.

The medal has been made available "to honor those veterans who risked their lives for freedom between June 6, 1944 and Aug. 31, 1944 in the Normandy Invasion."

To take back Europe from the German forces of Adolph Hitler, Allied troops would have to invade the coast of France, Holland or Belgium. Hitler knew this. The coasts of the three countries bristled with soldiers, deeply entrenched in concrete bunkers, and heavily supported by armored divisions.

On June 6, 1944 the Allied forces, made up of British, Canadian and American forces, landed on the beaches of Normandy in northwestern France.

Over 130,000 men landed the first day as part of "Operation Overlord" with more than 1 million following in the next month.

More than 9,300 white-cross-marked graves in a cemetery on the Normandy coast above Omaha Beach honor the soldiers who lost their lives during the D-Day Invasion.

On the front of the Medal of the Jubilee of Victory "OVERLORD 6 Juin 1944" is inscribed in the upper part with the flags of the Allied countries and the names of the landing

beaches on the face of the medal. American forces landed at Omaha and Utah beaches. On the back side of the medal is the Torch of Freedom surrounded by the device of William the Conqueror "Dieu et le Diable" - "God is with us."

"Each person buried here understood his duty, but also dreamed of going back home to the people and things he knew," President George W. Bush said during a ceremony at the Normandy cemetery last Memorial Day.



Medal winners Orin Ellingson, Armond Nelson, Bob "Peel" Johnson, and Luverne Ostby.

"The day will come when no one is left who knew them. ... The day will never come when America forgets them.

"Our nation, and the world, will always remember what they did here, what they gave here, for the future of humanity," he said.

Fifty-eight years ago, the fight to liberate Europe from the Nazis formed a bond between America and France, which then spread throughout Europe, "turning enemies to friends, and the pursuits of war to the pursuits of peace," Bush said.

That bond is renewed today, the president said, as European nations join with the United States in the struggle to rid the world of terrorism.

"Our security is still bound up together in a trans-Atlantic alliance, with soldiers in many uniforms defending the world from terrorists at this very hour," Bush said.

During a joint news conference in Paris after the Normandy ceremony, French President Jacques Chirac saluted Bush for spending the American Memorial Day holiday in Normandy paying "solemn tribute to the great number of young American servicemen who gave up their lives to fight for France, for Europe, for freedom."

"This fight for freedom, for liberty, is a constant fight, a fight that we all engage in; a fight that is a bond between the peoples of both sides of the Atlantic," Chirac said.

Nelson was a member of Company 44 Armored Infantry Battalion. Ostby was with the 474th Infantry Regiment of the 99th Battalion; Ellingson Battery C, 667 Field Artillery Battalion, and Johnson the 101st Infantry Regiment of the 26th Infantry Division. All four men landed in Normandy and later participated in fighting across northern France, the Ardennes, and the Rhineland in central Europe.



Luverne Ostby's footlocker on display at the 2010 Veteran's Day Observance. Donated by his Granddaughter in 2007.

Although not "official issue" trunks like these were common for soldiers during World War II.

In the years following the war, Luverne was married and raised a family in Central Minnesota. He worked as a telephone repairman. In his free time, he explored his love for fishing. Fishing was a passion for Luverne, and as a part of that passion he began to make and sell lures.



The Normandy Medal of the Jubilee of Liberation.

In 1994, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, Luverne was honored along with three others from his town. They were presented with the Normandy Medal of the Jubilee of Liberty by the Benson VFW Post 1403. The medal was presented to those veterans who served in the liberation of France from 6 June 1944 through 31 August 1944 as a part of the Normandy Campaign.



Luverne passed away on 14 January 2011 in Glenwood Minnesota at the age of 88. He is survived by his wife, and all but one of his children.