

## Vernon A. (Vern) Tharaldson– Private to Staff Sergeant

**Served with distinction in the Hq1 81mm Mortar Platoon from July 1944 to November 1945.**

Vernon Tharaldson was a courageous, outstanding soldier, a proven leader, a highly respected comrade, and a cherished friend.

Vernon Tharaldson was a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."

Vernon Tharaldson's accomplishments illustrate the phenomenal successes achieved by innumerable children of the great "depression."



Often deprived of a comfortable stress free home life and education, the "depression kids" served our country, and subsequently evolved into highly successful professionals, businessmen, and affluent citizens.

Vern's determination to succeed points up a predominant characteristic of the magnificent men that comprise the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation." If you knew them, you loved and respected them!

Vernon A. Tharaldson died June 21, 1992 in Proctor, MN. His devoted wife Pearl and his WW II comrades provided information presented in this summary.

Pearl confirms that Vern was born February 8, 1922 in Gonvick, MN. The youngest of 12 children. Vern's father died at age 59 leaving his wife to raise their brood in a small two-story farmhouse.

Home insulation was unknown in those days, and Vern often recalled the bitter cold northern Minnesota winters when he slept upstairs in the farmhouse with frost collecting on the nail heads in the ceiling.

Vern attended a county school and remembered how he had one pair of overalls that were washed each Saturday night so they would be clean for Church on Sunday.

Before he could finish grade school, Vern was forced to drop out to help support his family. Food was scarce – a few cows to milk, sparse produce gleaned from a small garden, and meat and fish provided by the two oldest brothers that were old enough to hunt deer and catch fish.

When Vern was 13, a neighbor asked him to come and help on a small farm while his wife recovered from surgery. Vern took over the household and farm duties, making bread, washing clothes, milking cows, cutting wood, making hay and anything else required to put food on the table and earn money for clothes.

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Pearl says. "Like many Hq1 veterans, Vernon seldom talked about his wartime experiences, so my contribution for this summary is limited to his post-war activities."

Pearl continues.

"Vernon was discharged from the service on February 11, 1946 at Camp McCoy, WI. He returned to Gonvick, MN where he was employed driving a Standard Oil truck.

He married a local girl (not Pearl) and they had two daughters. In 1954, Vernon was offered a position as Standard Oil agent in Duluth, MN and he moved his family.

A few years later, Vern formed the 'Tharaldson Oil Company' that was an immediate success. Unfortunately, Vern developed asthma and was forced to sell the company and move to Arizona.

Over the years, Vern longed to return to Duluth, MN and in 1969, he made the move. Vern went into the travel trailer business with a friend. This led to a divorce. In the early 70's, the travel trailer industry was booming, and Vern and his partner separated."



**Tharaldson's Trailer Sales Park**

In May 1971, Vern met Pearl in Duluth, MN. They married March 16, 1973, in Cromwell, MN. They built a very successful trailer sales business from which they retired in 1987.

Pearl continues. "After we retired, Vern and I traveled. We enjoyed going to the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment Association reunions.

The first reunion we attended was in Fayetteville, NC. Vern always remembered his emotional meeting with Glenn Sommerville, his WW II Section Sergeant who lost an eye and arm during the Battle of the Bulge.

Vern had helped carry "Slim" to a stretcher, and for many years believed he was dead."

Vernon Tharaldson joined Hq1 July 1944 in Nottingham, England. He was assigned to the 81mm Mortar Platoon and served therein for the remainder of this military career.

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After a short orientation and training period, Vern parachuted into a German occupied field near Nijmegen, Holland.

Following months of combat around the Nijmegen Bridge and its highway approaches, the men of Hq1, carrying their equipment, marched 22 miles to rendezvous with trucks which carried them to Sissonne, France.

Life in Sissonne was good, living in an old French Artillery Post with dry rooms, good food and with very little training.

Some Hq1 men even had three-day passes to Paris. However, it all ended on December 17, 1944, when the Germans launched a massive surprise attack through the Ardennes, trying to reach the English Channel.

The 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was alerted and on December 18, loaded into large open trucks and moved to Belgium. It was a long, cold ride, no food, and very brief rest halts.

At Werbomont, Belgium, Hq1 worked throughout the night and the following day to establish a defensive position. During the next few days, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR maneuvered to find the strongest positions from which to stop the advancing German armored and infantry forces.

Finally, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was ordered to Vielsalm, a town on the Salm River, to establish an escape corridor for the survivors of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division that were fleeing in front of the German forces. These desperate troops had been severely mauled in the surprise German attack. They had sustained numerous casualties and the loss of essential leadership. Their situation was desperate.

In the next few days, hundreds of men, trucks and tanks, transited the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR corridor to safety.

However, to establish the safety corridor, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR had organized an eight-mile salient extending into the German lines, and the regiment was vulnerable to being cutoff, surrounded and destroyed.

Hq1 mortar platoon observers and machine gunners were positioned at the tip of the salient, supporting the battalion's rifle companies.

On Christmas Eve, the regiment was ordered to withdraw and join the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division forces deployed on the main battle position.

Throughout that cold, snowy Christmas Eve night, Hq1 men executed a dangerous withdrawal. Impeded by deep snow and cold, and German patrols, the trudging columns of men moved through the night to the new battle position.

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Near the end of the first week in January 1945, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR launched a counterattack through the Ardennes and the fortified Siegfried Line.

The Hq1 men experienced the perils of winter warfare in the coldest winter Europe had in many years.

The men fought in the bitter cold, through deep snow and hilly terrain. Casualties from the weather were equal to or greater than those inflicted by the Germans.

Many casualties were in danger of freezing to death before they could be evacuated.

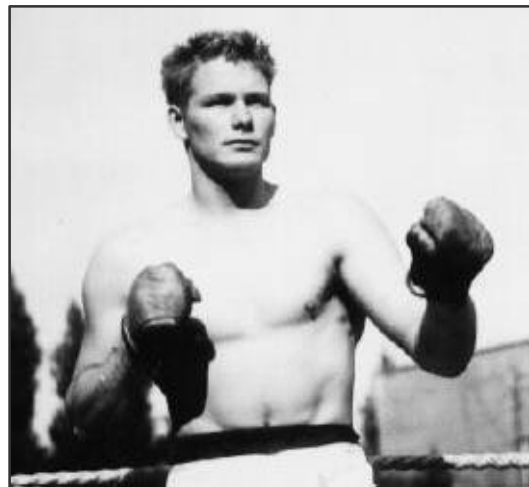
By March 1945, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was occupying the west bank of the Roer River. The German “bulge” had been destroyed and the regiment was relieved from combat. It returned to Sissonne where it occupied a tent camp.

Training commenced immediately including a practice parachute jump. A few weeks later, the regiment was ordered to an airfield outside of Paris, alerted to parachute into prisoner-of-war camps to rescue allied prisoners.

After several weeks, these dangerous missions were cancelled; the war in Europe had ended.

The 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was selected to be the security force and honor guard for General Eisenhower’s headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany.

While in Nottingham, England Vernon Tharaldson demonstrated a unique aptitude for boxing, and was immediately drafted into the regimental boxing team, he became a star. The fighters provided many enjoyable hours of entertainment for the troops. Vernon’s popularity as a boxer increased when he fought exhibition rounds with Joe Louis.



While on occupation duty in Hedderheim, Germany, Vern performed his duties and concurrently entertained troops, winning many boxing awards for the regiment.

Vern was unusually proud of the “hole-in-one” he scored in 1990 at a Sun City, AZ golf course.

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Vernon Tharaldson was a brave, dependable soldier, he was awarded a

- ?? Bronze Star
- ?? Purple Heart Medal
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge,
- ?? Parachute Qualification badge with a combat jump star,
- ?? Tree battle stars and an Invasion Arrowhead,
- ?? the Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army,
- ?? Belgium Fourragere,
- ?? and numerous defense medals.



**Vernon & Pearl Tharaldson**

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## **This Album is Not For Sale**

**T**his excerpt from the “We Served Proudly, The Men of Hq1” album contains the recollections of men who in their youth risked their lives in furtherance of our national interests. These memoirs are sacred to them -- especially those events alluding to activities in which comrades lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe.

This album was prepared for perpetual residence in the archives of the Camp Blanding Museum complex, operated by the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, Inc. Starke, Florida. We are grateful for the support and assistance of the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, and for their kindness in having the museum make our album available to historians, students, researchers and others interested in our background and brief history.

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Copies of the album have been presented to the Hq1 veterans or their survivors that contributed information for the effort. To facilitate reproducing copies of individual memoirs for relatives or friends, the memoirs have been developed as separate entities.

**October 19, 2004**

**George S. Stok**

**Hq1 Album Collator**