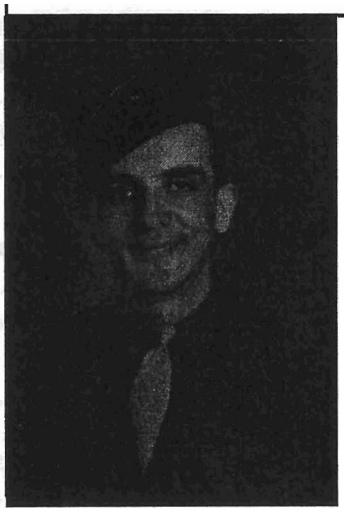
The Old Hickory Chronicle

Newsletter of the Old Hickory Association July/August 2006

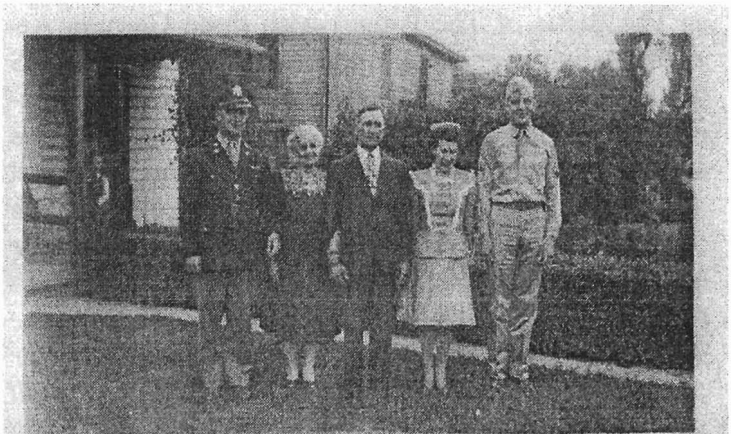
S/Sgt Wilbert W. Conover, 120th Inf. Reg.

By William J. Wilde



Wilbert W. Conover, affectionately known by his family as "Toe", was born in Parkesburg, Pa. on September 8, 1917. The seventh child out of nine, he was the son of the late John and Anna Bunting Conover. He attended the Parkesburg School and the Parkesburg Methodist Church. Parkesburg, with a population of 2500, was a booming steel town nestled in the rolling farmlands of Western Chester County. Most men in town, including Wilbert's father, were employed by the Parkesburg Iron Company which manufactured "charcoal iron" boiler tubes for steam locomotives. The company closed its doors in 1926 unable to diversify when new government regulations required boiler tubes to be replaced by less expensive manufactured steel tubes. The plant's closure; however, was not devastating for many of the workers soon found employment at Lukens Steel Company eight miles down the road in Coatesville.

Toe, like his father and brothers, began his steel making career at Lukens on February 3, 1939. He was married the following year to Jean E. Thompson and was employed as a crane operator until March 29, 1943. He entered the service on April 8, 1943 at New Cumberland and arrived at Fort McClellan (Army Infantry Replacement Training Center) located in Anniston, Alabama on April 17th for basic training. From Fort McClellan he was transferred to Fort George G. Meade, MD arriving there on May 13, 1944 and by May 22, he was at Camp Shanks. On June 19th he boarded the troopship Louis Pasteur and landed in Scotland on June 29, 1944.



Robert Conover, Anna Conover, John Conover, Jean Conover and Wilbert Conover

Sent into France as a replacement he was assigned to I Company, 120th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division. The 30th Inf. Division, nicknamed "Old Hickory" spearheaded the all-important breakthrough south of St. Lo, France; however, some of the heaviest fighting remained to be accomplished by the 30th when they alone stopped one of the German Army's major counter attacks in the Mortain -St. Barthelmy sector of France. German troops nicknamed the 30th, "Roosevelt's SS". Historians would later call the Division the Workhorse of the Western

(Continued from page 1)
Front.

The recorded events of his personal combat life in Europe are sketchy but by July 12 of 1944 he had received the Combat Infantry Badge which translated into a $10.00 a month raise in Army pay. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant on November 6, 1944, wounded on Nov. 9, 1944 and hospitalized with shrapnel and burns to his leg. After he was released from the hospital he returned to his unit on December 3, 1944 at Kerkrade, Holland. In a censored "V Mail" letter home dated December 1944 he mentioned about being *"somewhere in Holland"* and jokingly added he wished it had the word "New" in front of his present location. He continued, *"Living in these foxholes each day and night with the sky as our blanket isn't like home but, most all of us are willing to sacrifice a little to bring this war to an end ..."*

On December 16, 1944, achieving total surprise, Hitler unleashed his last full scale offensive (known as The Battle of The Bulge) with three German Armies totaling over a half a million men, attacking US forces in the Ardennes region of Belguim and Luxembourg. On Dec. 17th the entire 120th regiment was alerted and was soon transported to the front just north of Malmedy. December 28th he wrote ..." *We did not have turkey on Christmas day but made up for it yesterday. Christmas we were dug in fox hole positions with only K and C rations. The war took some what of a turn making things look some what in favor of the Jerries. At the present we are giving them all they want so maybe with good weather we can end it all by Spring. Let's hope."*

On the morning of January 3, 1945 S/Sgt Conover lead his squad into a wooded sector. The day was foggy and new snow was falling making visibility difficult. Suddenly, small arms fire opened up on the men and Wilbert went down. According to his comrade's letter, "... he had a smile upon his face. He started crawling back and the Co. Commander and another one of his buddies went out to help him. They were fired upon again and he and his friend were hit. This second wound did the most harm". Within minutes they got him back to the 47th Field Hospital where he died a few hours later. His body was buried the next day at the US Military Cemetery Henri Chapelle.

His wife received a telegram 19 days later which stated he had been seriously wounded. The following day, the same delivery boy knocked at the door with his head down and handed Jean another telegram notifying her of his death. He was 27 years old.

Upon hearing of his brother's death his younger brother Don, a GI in the US First Division, requested to be transferred into a frontline combat unit to seek revenge while brother Bob was headed for the Pacific Theater as a P-38 pilot. Memorial services were held at the Parkesburg Methodist Church on February 18, 1945.

The cemetery in Belgium where Toe was buried was to be moved to a permanent site and families were given the choice to have the remains shipped home or interred in the new American cemetery overseas. On November 21, 1947 his remains were buried with military honors at Fairview Cemetery, Coatesville, Pa.

Jean told me years later that she was not able to move on until after his body was brought back home. Eventually, she remarried a wonderful guy, from Coatesville, also a veteran of the Battle of The Bulge.

Toe wrote home the day before he was killed, *"There is not much news but, I am doing swell. Things are a little tough but, with God's protection I know I will see it thru. Give my love to all and God bless each and everyone of you."* I think He has. Thank you.

The author would love to hear from anyone that remembers Toe - ed.

William J. Wilde
300 Swan Road
Atglen, PA 19310

(610) 593-5776

Unit News

My last newsletter

This will be my last newsletter as editor of the Old Hickory Chronicle. After this issue, Walt Sowinski will taking over as editor so any articles or information will need to be passed on to him. His contact information is listed on the last page of this issue.

I appreciate all the support and help the members have given me over the ten years that I've been doing the newsletter even though getting articles out of some members was like pulling wisdom teeth.

I'm sure Walt will do a great job and will add some creativeness and new ideas to this publication. He also will need your support. Don't be afraid to submit something for him to add to the newsletter.

Best of Luck Walt.

---- Don Shupe

30th IDA Association Reunion

We have the reunion coming up September 20 - 24, 2006. There has been one change to the schedule since the last newsletter, that being the Memorial Service has been moved from Friday morning to Saturday morning at 9:30am.

The last update from Armed Forces Reunions, which is handling the meal registrations didn't show any OHA members signed up. Come on guys! Get with it. You may never have this opportunity again to sit and talk with these fine gentlemen. Plus we are the hosts for the reunion. I still waiting to hear from volunteers for the Color Guard and to help man the display.

You all should have gotten registration forms with your last newsletter and the cut-off date for getting them in is August 17, 2006. We need you!

New Board of Directors

A new Board of Directors was elected June 4th, 2006 and they assumed their roles as of July 1. There is a nice mix of returning members plus two new members.

The new Board in composed of: Jim Higgins, Mike Owens, Walt Sowinski, Neil Trivette, and Clint Yarbrough. Their contact information is listed on the last page of this newsletter.

As of this printing Officers of the Association had not been elected.

Butner Shoot

Plans are in place to hold our live fire event at Camp Butner, October 6/8, 2006.

This will be a pre-registration event as in the past. Watch for further information in September.

Successful Memorial Day Service

Despite being a bit short handed we had a successful Memorial Day service this year. We had a great crowd gathered round the Old Hickory monument on the Old Capitol Grounds in Raleigh.

Thanks to all our members that made the extra effort to come out and pay tribute to the fallen members of the Old Hickory Division.

July 4th Display

We had our annual display set up in Raleigh for the July 4th Holiday. There was a good crowd come through the display which ran from 10:00am to 3:00pm. It was a hot one but thank goodness we had our usual area which did offer some shade. We had a nice variety of uniforms being worn by our members and a nice mix of equipment for the display based around the M1942 command tent. The usefulness of the group's enclosed trailer again proved itself. It makes the display go much smoother having everything we need in the trailer and at the end of the display the trailer can be loaded up, driven back and dropped off, without having to worry about having help to get it all unloaded.

Website

We managed to lose the domain name to our website due to an oversight. It was immediately taken and offered back to us at a cost $500. We elected to go with a new one instead. To get to the OHA website go to www.oldhickoryassociation.com

For Sale

Old Hickory Association Items:
Grey T-Shirt w/ OHA logo, S-XL $10, XXL $12.50
Golf Shirt, White or Grey, w/ OHA, S-XL $22.50, XXL $25.00
Grey Sweatshirt w/ OHA logo, S-XL $18, XXL $20.00
Ball Cap, Grey body w/ blue bill w/ OHA logo, $11.00
Prices do not include shipping.
Contact Brett Bondurant
919-431-0984,
bondo1@nc.rr.com

Reproduction Items:
World War II Reproduction Rations
Complete reproduction of WW2 K ration, C ration, and D bars, as well as other accessories such as Foot Powder, Charms, PK gum, fuel tablets, batteries, and more. Catalog available.
www.angelfire.com/nc/stug
Todd Hogan, 224 S. Melville Street, Graham, NC 27253
Email: thogan@triad.rr.com

World War II Impressions
U.S. Army uniforms and accessories. Catalog available.
7165 Adwen Street, Downey, CA, 90241
Fax and Phone: (562) 927-6922 Email: WWIIIMPRESSIONS@MSN.COM

What Price Glory
Reproduction uniforms and accessories.
238-A Commission Street
Salinas CA 93901
Toll Free Order Line:888-431-2351
Inquiry Line:831-754-2351 http://www.whatpriceglory.com/usunif.htm

Upcoming Events

July 4, 2006
Fourth of July Display
Capital Grounds
Raleigh, NC

September 20/24, 2006
30th IDA National Reunion.
Greensboro, NC.

October 6/8, 2006
Butner Live fire Shoot
Camp Butner

October 2006
Chesterfield, VA Air show

October, 2006
Buck Springs Reenactment
TBD

The Old Hickory Chronicle is the newsletter of The Old Hickory Association. It is published 6 times a year in January, March, May, July, September and November. Articles are contributed by members of the Association and submissions are always welcome.
Contacts for the Old Hickory Association:

Board of Directors
Jim Higgins
919-556-1014, higginsboats@yahoo.com
Mike Owens
919-380-1771, Garand7449@AOL.COM
Walt Sowinski
336-379-8007, walbear@infionline.net
Neil Trivette
336-367-3670, ntrivette@triad.rr.com
Clint Yarbrough
336-299-1981, 42wc21@triad.rr.com

Reenactments and recruiting: Clint Yarbrough
Marksmanship: Jim Higgins
Displays, 30th ID History, tbd
Drill and Ceremony: Mark Burfete, 828-863-2253, email: mrburfete@alltel.net
OHA website: http://www.oldhickoryassociation.com
Email: TheOHA@msn.com
Mailing address: The Old Hickory Association
219 South Ridge Drive
Garner, NC 27529