

Jack Marsden, Combat Infantryman
by Bill Montgomery

My first cousin, Jack Marsden served in the second platoon of "K" company, third Battalion, 376 Infantry regiment, 94th Infantry Division in the European theater of operations in WWII. He received the purple heart for wounds received in combat. What follows is a brief history of Jack's wartime service.

The 94th Division landed at Normandy - 94 days after the "D" day invasion - September 8, 1944.

For the first 106 days of combat the 94th was involved in a holding action around St Nazaire and Lorient called "The forgotten front". The purpose of the action was to contain a pocket containing of 32,000 German troops - bypassed by the allied armies as they swept through France in their race toward Germany. The pocket of German soldiers - though cut off was none the less dangerous. The actions of that 106 day period consisted of reconnaissance and combat patrols rather than large scale assaults. Most of the combat occurred in an area around the Brest-Nantes canal west of Blain and Bouvron called the "Spider" - formed by ten roads that radiated out from a hub. The 376th received its first casualty in the town of Blain on September 17, 1944 when the Germans sent a railway car loaded with explosives hurtling into the town. The car jumped the tracks and kept rolling. John T. Miller walked toward the car, just as it exploded. A flying piece of sheet

metal killed him. Men of the 376 Infantry Regiment were billeted in groups of three to five men in earthen bunkers buttressed by sandbags with a roof of corrugated metal covered with earth. Rifle ports faced out in three directions towards the German lines. These dugouts were spaced about a quarter of a mile apart and were capable of withstanding the blast of all but a direct hit from a 240 mm Howitzer. Jack found a 30 Cal. light machine gun in an abandoned half track that he propped up in one of the rifle ports aimed at the enemy lines.

"K" company was involved in a combat patrol on a drizzly cold morning on November 11, 1944 when the first platoon was sent into Bouvron to assess the German strength. The object was to engage the enemy then withdraw hoping that the Germans would follow.

The third platoon was guarding the flank hoping to catch the Germans in a crossfire. After an intense firefight the patrol withdrew with a single casualty - PFC John Mac Donald was killed. It is worth noting that a number of the Free French forces joined the 376th Regiment on November 14, 1944. Fighting in all French units attached to the 94th or simply as ordinary Dough boys serving with the 94th without pay!