



*103d Infantry Division (Cactus)
Company F, 2d Battalion
411th Infantry Regiment*



SGT Robert Louis Blustin

While shopping at Duluth's Garon Brothers Jewelry Store, you may notice a photo of war hero MG Anthony McAuliffe pinning a Silver Star onto Robert Blustin during WWII. In addition to the photo, you will see a case with historic photos of the shop that date back to the 1900s. There is also an assorted display of military pins and a historic Dick Tracy watch. The Garon Brothers Jewelry Store itself is historic, considering that it is 105 years old. The current owner, Dave Blustin, is proud of the history he has collected and has on display. And when it comes to his father's history, few know the story as well as Dave does.

Robert Louis Blustin was born November 26, 1923, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Early in his childhood, his family moved to Duluth, where the family has resided ever since. He graduated from Duluth Central High School in 1942, and by 1943 he was drafted into the Army, where he was part of the Army Air Corps. During basic training, he was tested and placed in the Army Specialized Training Program. While there, he was given a college education at Oklahoma A & M until the program was disbanded in March of 1944. Many of the students went from being students to being transferred into the 103rd Infantry Division. The 103rd Division was nicknamed the "Cactus Division" because originally it started as a regional National Guard unit out of the Southwest, but at this time it was changed into an active division. Robert served in the 1st Squad, Company F, 2d Battalion, 411th Infantry Regiment. They were sent for training to Camp Howze, Texas, and then to Camp Shanks, New York where they were shipped to Europe.

While on board ship to Europe, Robert missed roll call because he was upstairs playing craps with a friend, who was a bigger guy from Texas. When they had to report for misbehavior, the Texan said he would take care of it. When the officers got done yelling at them for their behavior, the Texan replied, "Maybe you should send us back, then?" Of course, that didn't happen, and they went about their business. Eventually, they landed at Marseilles and became part of Operation Dragoon, the Allied invasion of southern France. When they arrived, they needed to march about 10-15 miles to their camp. They continued training, until they took a troop train to Epinal to relieve the 45th Division.

They were committed to the front line on November 11, 1944. Robert remembered that it was a rainy and cold fight, especially as they fought in the Vosges Mountains. It was here that Robert hit a roadblock with a German machine gunner. Robert and three guys decided to do a flanking maneuver on the machine gunner's position; SGT Blustin eventually got close enough to shoot the machine gunner. Once the machine gunner was shot, the rest of the German unit surrendered. It was because of this bold action that he was awarded the Silver Star. As is common with many veterans of all eras, Robert barely talked about the Silver Star incident throughout his life. It was something that barely came up, and then only when someone asked about it. One time his son had asked him to talk about what had happened, and he replied, "It says what happened in the citation. Read that." According to his son, he always was a very humble man. After he received the Silver Star, the Duluth Herald published an article, on June 30, 1945, entitled "Duluth GI Seconds 'Nuts' Cry." The family still has the article today.

During the war, Robert received two Purple Hearts. The first one he received in November 1944. While marching, his unit came under fire, and he was hit with shrapnel to the face. He refused to leave the line and stayed with his unit. He earned the second Purple Heart on December 13, 1944. While on a march, one of the men in the unit tripped a wire, which caused an explosion. Robert received shrapnel in the calf and was shipped to Dijon, France, where he was treated and recuperated. By February 28, 1945, he was back in the unit. He returned in time to be part of the "Big Push," which was a nickname for the last major Allied offensive in the European Theater. Within seven weeks they had crossed the Rhine and were in Austria. They were moving so fast that they decided to drop many items they usually carried, such as gas masks. They moved into Austria to help combat the Werewolf soldiers that were supposed to exist in the mountains. The Werewolf unit of the Germans was a unit designed for guerrilla warfare against the Allies. The Werewolves were fairly successful in causing injury to reconstruction efforts, but over time most of the population of Germany wanted to move on, and they did. SGT Blustin was part of an effort that was able to liberate a concentration camp near Landsberg; a satellite camp to the much larger Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany, which was liberated by both the 42nd and 45th Divisions.

He eventually returned back to the United States bringing with him war souvenirs. He brought back a Nazi sword, dagger, and a 32-caliber pistol. While in Germany he had someone make a holster for the pistol. He also tried to bring back a P-38, but lost it by the time he returned. The items he brought back now reside within the family.

Robert's story is just one of the many great and heroic stories of veterans of World War II from St. Louis County, Minnesota.