

VAAL G. DUDENBOSTEL



Vaal Gene Dudenbostel was born in Willisville, Illinois 3 September 1922. He grew up in West Frankfort, Illinois and graduated from West Frankfort High School in 1940. After graduation, Vaal worked as a truck driver until he entered the Army in August, 1942 where he finished his initial basic training at Camp Grant, Illinois on 2 December of that same year.

On the 19th December, 1942, PVT Vaal Gene "Dude" Dudenbostel joined Company D, 409th Infantry, from the Reception Center at Camp Grant. On April 1, 1943 "Dude" was promoted to the rank of Private First Class.

Company D left Area X at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and crossed the IP at 1102 hours and traveled 67 miles arriving at the Division Maneuver Area at 1600; located some 3.5 miles southwest of Leesville, Louisiana. PFC Dudenbostel participated in the Louisiana 3rd Army Maneuvers during the period September 17 through November 20, 1943 when the company undertook a motor movement from the Concentration Area at Merryville, La, to Camp Howze, Tx. During the 300 mile trip there was an overnight bivouac at Camp Fannin, Texas. The unit arrived in Camp Howze, Texas, their new permanent station, on November 21, 1943. .

On December 28, 1943, PFC Dudenbostel was promoted to Temporary Corporal.

September 21, 1944, the unit left Camp Howze, Texas by rail on a permanent change of station to Camp Shanks, New York, where they arrived on the morning of September 24, 1944.

On October 5, 1944, Company D, 409th Infantry departed at 1905 hours from Camp Shank New York for travel to the New York Port of Entry where they arrived at 1930 hours. There they boarded the USS Monticello and left for an "unknown" destination. Later, while at sea, the troops were informed they were going to Marseilles, France arriving on October 20, 1944.



The story told by Vaal's brothers, and one Vaal Dudenbostel himself corroborated, was that during combat operations, somewhere in France during the latter days of November, 1944, Vaal was hit by sniper fire. The bullet entered his helmet, ricocheted off his skull, then passed between the skull and scalp, exiting out the back of his head. According to the story, it was not serious enough to require immediate medical attention, but left CPL Dudenbostel with a serious headache for a couple of days. This wound accounted for his first Purple Heart.



On 24 November 1944 CPL Dudenbostel was promoted to Sergeant, along with CPL Thomas R. Duff.

December 2nd, Vaal's Section Sergeant, SSG Elvin Beemer was a Forward Observer when he captured at Selestat. SSG Beemer spent the rest of the war as a POW.

Based on the best information available, it appears that SGT Dudenbostel was given the responsibility of Section Sergeant after SSG Elvin Beemer's capture. On December 14, 1944 Platoon Leader 1LT Ralph Lamb, Platoon Sergeant TSG Louis Smith, radio operator SGT Thomas Duff, and SGT Vaal Dudenbostel went forward near Cleebourg France to set up a Forward Observation post. SGT Dudenbostel recounted to his oldest son, Kevin Dudenbostel, that the three men had captured a German soldier. After his capture, the German prisoner was standing beside the four men from D Company. SGT Dudenbostel had bent over to call in coordinates when an incoming round, thought to be either a mortar or 88mm, passed through the German prisoner, killing him instantly. The round exploded killing 1LT Lamb and SGT Duff and wounding Staff Sergeant Smith who was transferred to the 57th Field Hospital, where he died seven days later of his wounds. SGT



Dudenbostel took shrapnel in his back and was transferred to the 59th Evacuation Hospital. SGT Dudenbostel spent the remainder of the war with elements of the 7th Army. On February 20, 1946 SGT Dudenbostel was discharged. After the war, he followed in his father's footsteps going underground to mine coal in the Orient Mine #2 in West Frankfort. After two years, Vaal decided that mining was not to his liking, particularly in light of the fact his father had died of black lung disease while Vaal was deployed in Europe during the war. Less than two years after his decision, 21 December 1951 one of the nation's worst mine disasters occurred at Orient #2 during the last shift before the Christmas holidays. That accident killed 119 men. Vaal always felt it was divine guidance that drove him from the mines and back into the military. Vaal joined the Illinois National Guard on 24 January 1949 and was appointed a full-time Administrative Assistant to the Illinois Adjutant General. He rose to the rank of First Sergeant. On 13 January 1951 Vaal received a Warrant and was promoted to W02 while on active duty at Fort Lewis Washington as a result of President Truman's call-up of the

Illinois National Guard's 44th Infantry Division on 13 January 1952. During this period, W02 Dudenbostel's unit was responsible for training recruits for deployment into the Korean theatre. After his release from Active Duty, 17 January 1954, W02 Dudenbostel returned to West Frankfort and resumed his full-time Administrative role with the National Guard. Later, when the unit was reorganized and lost its Warrant slots, W02 Dudenbostel chose to revert back to the rank of First Sergeant rather than transfer to the Individual Ready Reserve. He served Company B, 130th Infantry First Sergeant until his untimely death at the young age of 39. First Sergeant Vaal Dudenbostel passed away three days into his unit's summer camp at Camp Ripley, Minnesota on July 9, 1962. He was buried in his home town of West Frankfort, Illinois. Today, a plaque hangs in his honor in the entrance to the West Frankfort Armory. The plaque serves as a legacy to 1SG Vaal Dudenbostel's leadership. It reads, "In memory of 1SG Vaal G. Dudenbostel, Co B., 1st B. G. 130th Infantry His devotion to his unit was only surpassed by his love for his men and country."



Vaal and Ed Gulick engage in a little bayonet drill at Camp Claiborne