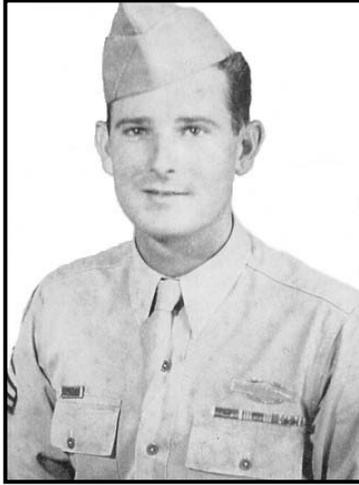
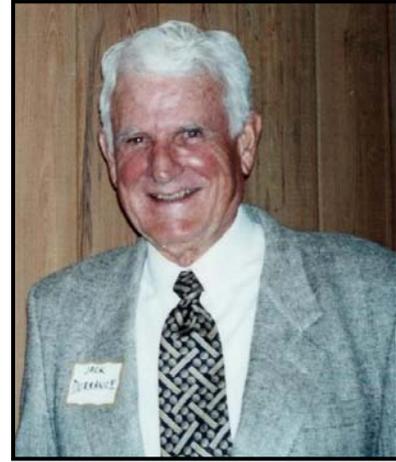


## S/SGT John R. (Jack) Durrance



Jack was born in Volusia County, near Deland, FL on December 20, 1923. His family moved to Gainesville, FL when he was two.

During World War One his father left college to volunteer for the Navy. He was sent to the Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD and received a



commission. After the war, with a wife and two small children, Jack (age two) and daughter Jean (age four), he returned to the University of Florida to complete his education.

Jack was a 17 year old College student when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He was in the Reserve Officers Training Corps at the University of Florida. He attended the ASTP program at Oklahoma A&M. When the program was canceled, he was assigned to the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division at Camp Howze where he served with D-Co (Heavy Weapons), 409<sup>th</sup> Regiment as a machine gunner.

He participated in surprise attack behind enemy lines to capture Steige, France.

He was wounded on December 20, 1944 while attacking at the Siegfried Line and again on March 22, 1945. He rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant and was later commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> LT (post war). He was awarded The Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, three Battle Stars, Glider Wings, Paratrooper Badge, and the Combat Infantryman's Badge. He is married to Janet Hiers Durrance and has four children and eight grandchildren.

He received his Bachelor and Masters degrees from the University of Florida where he taught as a faculty member while working toward a doctorate, which he did not complete.

He was employed by the United States Navy as a psychologist at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida prior to becoming a Special Agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the New York City area. He was an Alachua County Commissioner in Florida from 1954 to 1982. He has been retired since selling his ownership in a warehouse and trucking business in 1984.

Jack has written his WWII memoirs in a book titled, "My Little Corner of A War."

Al Sodman was firing our machine-gun and targeting a German pillbox in the Siegfried Line area in December 1944. Al was giving covering fire for a rifleman who was

attempting to attach an explosive device, we called a "beehive", to a German pillbox. This was what we used in WWII. In the middle of all this, Al asked me to give him a short break while he went to the bathroom. For my part, Nature's call was most untimely, but Al was convincing. I somewhat reluctantly took over the gun. I no sooner began firing than a piece of shrapnel caught me in my right shoulder. Although this wound was recorded to have happened on December 22nd, it actually was on my twenty first birthday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944. A Birthday party like this is not one to be forgotten! I spent a cold miserable night in my foxhole afraid to peek at my wound, but in the absence of very much bleeding, and after some careful thought, I decided it was safer to wait with my light shoulder wound for a couple of days rather than risk the German sniper fire that was between me and the aid station.

On March 22, 1945 we left the trenches and began moving to our left. After going down the hill we were on and getting almost to the top of another, we started getting our machine gun in position to give fire support for our riflemen. Although all three of us held the same Staff Sergeant rank, there had only been replacements enough for two squads made up of the replacements and survivors. Jeff Jennings and I were now serving as squad leaders over seven men each instead of the usual fourteen. Doug Merrill was serving as our section sergeant. As I sat down and turned back to watch Al Sodman get our gun ready, a mortar round exploded in back of me. Three of us, Doug Merrill, Al Sodman and I, were wounded by this same mortar round. Shrapnel tore through three layers of clothing on the right side of my back, and exited the left side. It felt like a giant hand had tugged me by my field jacket. My wounds were not great, however, compared to those received by Doug and Al. They suffered the greatest wounds by far. Along with many other shrapnel cuts Doug's leg and Al's wrist and hand were badly hurt. We all started down the hill to the aid station, but neither Doug nor Al was able to walk. I went on and stretcher bearers came up the hill to carry them back. I was taken to the rear in an ambulance. One of the occupants was a wounded German soldier who had been hit six times previously.