

L V E COMPANY



**L Company, 399th Infantry Regiment, of the 100th
Infantry Division during World War II and beyond**

By JOHN M. KHOURY

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Printed at:
Ted Weiss Printing
409 Bridgetown Pike
Langhorne, PA

Published by:
Chi Chi Press
PO Box 914
Maywood, NJ 07607
(800) 807-8265

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ISBN 0-9727330-0-0

**TO THOSE FELLOW INFANTRYMEN
WHO NEVER SAW ANY GLORY IN WAR,
ONLY THE MISERY OF WAR,
AND COULD NEVER FORGET IT
OR TELL OF IT**

About the author

John M. Khoury was born in Brooklyn. He was educated in New York City schools and attended Columbia University for two years. After his military service, he joined his father's wholesale linen importing company. Over the years, the business changed because of marketing conditions and public tastes. Hand-embroidered fancy linens were replaced by no-iron merchandise. The retail trade was dramatically changed by discounters and shopping malls. To keep up with the changes, he made many trips abroad to import textile products that were in demand. Although he was successful in business, he was always aware of the folly of striving to amass great wealth. His experience as an infantryman made him value the things that are meaningful and priceless in one's life. To have survived combat when other comrades died in their prime of life gave him a feeling of blessing that permeates his thoughts every passing day.

He married a lovely childhood friend who has brought happiness into his life. They have a family of four children who have successfully made a place in society. They are all independent in their careers and are the pride of his life. This book has been written for them, their children and for later generations. His hope is that they will understand how it once was to serve one's country in a war that resulted in the greatest loss of human life in history.

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MORNING REPORTS

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PREFACE

I was an ordinary infantry soldier who served my country in World War II, a time of national peril. When I was discharged from the U.S. Army in 1946, at the convenience of the government, I put that period behind me and returned to civilian life. I wanted to forget those days but no matter how I tried, I could not completely erase all those memories.

After two years, I found and married the little girl who had once lived on my street. She had grown into a beautiful young woman. We had a family of three girls and one boy. As the years went by, the children would ask about my wartime experiences. How could I answer their questions? I could not brag about being a great warrior or hero. I would not describe the life of a dogface in the front line where teenage buddies were wounded and killed every day. Instead, I tried to tell about the funny experiences that unexpectedly humanized the tragedy of war. Although this satisfied their curiosity, temporarily, they still wanted to hear more, but I did not want to go back to that period in my life.

What made me decide to dig into the past and bring up the times that I wanted to forget? It may have been the reunions of the 100th Infantry Division where I met the young boys who were becoming old men. They still felt undiminished affection for their fellow comrades in arms. It may have been the trip back to the battlefields in France and Germany where I could almost see the ghosts of lost foxhole buddies. In the American Military Cemetery at Epinal, I bowed my head and could not hold back a tear at the grave of each lost soul I once knew. It was then that I asked myself, "Should I write the stories of our old company?" I thought of all that I could remember and it seemed as though I had amnesia. I had so thoroughly wiped away those memories that I sometimes questioned whether I had actually been there. It was then that I was challenged to go back to those days and write about what happened to those who served in our company during the war.

I did not keep a diary. No one I knew kept a diary. When you are not sure if you are going to see the next sunrise, the idea of writing notes in a diary is of no importance. Besides, the Army advised that you should not keep records in case you are captured, wounded or killed and fall into the hands of the enemy. Your diary could be a source of information that

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might endanger the lives of the men in your unit. As a practical matter, you had to carry everything that was essential and that did not include a pad of paper and a pencil. That paper and pencil had to be protected inside dirty clothing through the cruelest weather conditions. A pencil was the sole handwriting instrument in those days and a bayonet was a pencil sharpener. Ballpoint pens were not available then.

The beginning of 1944 was a period of reorganization in the U.S. Army. The war in Europe had changed from air and sea battles to a land battle. The Luftwaffe was on the defensive and the seas were now controlled by the Allied navies. Ground forces were needed for the invasion of the Continent after the campaign in North Africa. Some infantry divisions in the U.S. were stripped of troops that were sent to Europe as replacements.

The 100th Infantry Division sent 3,675 men as replacements between April and September 1944. From activation on 14 November 1942 until embarkation in October 1944, replacements from the division totaled 14,787 enlisted men and 1,460 officers. At one time, it was feared that the 100th would be just a training division and never be sent into combat but that changed.

During the spring and summer of 1944, it was brought up to full strength as a fighting force with soldiers from other units. Enlisted men and officers came from deactivated anti-aircraft units; bright young men came from the cancelled Army Specialist Training Program (ASTP); cadets came from the Army Air Corps training program; and others came from stateside coast artillery, ordnance, and other units from as far away as the Aleutian Islands.

This is one soldier's story during those turbulent times. It is not about a hero or a great patriot. It is meant to take the reader along with the young man to see through his eyes what he saw and to understand what he thought. He has tried to make the experiences as human as possible, so that sensation is discarded for sensitivity. Words are not adequate to describe the feelings of fear, cold, relief, determination, or exhaustion. Those feelings will always remain with the writer.