



Railsplitters

To all the men of the 84th Infantry Division—

One of the many...



Photo by Maurice Miller, Courtesy of Mark Miller

Major James V. Johnston, Jr.
Commanding Officer, 2nd Bn., 334th Regt., 84th Infantry Division

August 8, 2007

Dear 84th ID Veteran,

Major Johnston's mother Margaret and my father were sister and brother, so I am Major Johnston's first cousin. I was born in 1940 and remember vividly the day my dad got word that Jimmy, his nephew, had been killed in March of 1945.

After a Memorial Day service in 2005, I decided to try to use the Internet to find out about cousin Jimmy. I did not know his unit or rank, but quickly discovered several accounts about him. As I accumulated more information about him and about all of you of the 84th ID, I decided to attend the Nashville reunion and try to compile this document to honor him and all of the men of the 84th.

I attended the reunion in Nashville in 2006 and met Brick Bradford and Art Mahler whose accounts are in this document. I wanted to meet more of you in Springfield but was not able to make it, so I sent some copies of an early DRAFT of this document to Brick to bring and to hand out for comments.

That early draft has been updated with an account of my wonderful meeting with Sgt. Walter Chapman, a mortar man in Co. H and later the artist who illustrated the Division's history by Draper.

Please help and contact me with any comments or incidents that you may recall about Jimmy or the unit or anything that I may have misstated or omitted. Any suggestions for additional content will be appreciated.

The nation owes you all such a debt for your service, and hopefully this document can make a small contribution towards ensuring that future generations will not forget your service and sacrifices.

Respectfully Yours,

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References:

Draper, Theodore, The 84th Infantry Division in the Battle of Germany: November 1944—May 1945, Reprinted 2000, The Battery Press, Nashville, 260 pages, Roster 160 pages.

Wolff, Peter S., Fortune Favors the Brave: A History of the 334th Infantry 84th ID, 1945, Mannheimer Grobdruckerei, 230 pages.

Drawings and Watercolors by Sgt. Walter Chapman, Co. H, 334th Regt., 84th ID from the scanned digital collection of Baker Mitchell.



Peggy, 2009



Jim, circa 1922

With His Sister, Margaret “Peggy” Johnston Gould Dec., 2007

Redding, Connecticut by phone with Baker Mitchell: Whatever school we were in, my older brother Jim always had the highest IQ in the school. We never spoke of this directly, and Mom and Dad didn’t make a big deal out of it. But we kids knew. When I went to Oregon State in Corvallis, Dean Dubeck called me into his office and told me that Jimmy had a superior IQ and that I would do just fine.

Growing up in the Depression, we seldom had much money, but it never seemed to matter – we were just a warm, happy family. With no money and no television for entertainment, people would get together for a dinner of spaghetti or whatever was plentiful to eat and then play card games afterwards. The adults would play cards in the living room, and we teenagers would play poker in the dining room. We always made Jim the croupier to organize things and keep track of the chips. One of his hobbies was organizing his stamp collection. Wherever he went, Jim was always very well liked. Even in high school, his presence was always felt the minute he walked into

a room. As far back as I can remember, he just had a way of making people comfortable around him with his presence.

Both Jim and Mitchell were always working at odd jobs to earn money during



high school. He was very talented on the tenor saxophone and the clarinet, so he formed a band that he called "Jimmy Johnston's Band." His band played for all the local tea dances and at clubs and restaurants to earn money.

Jim didn't play organized sports, but he loved the outdoors and was a Boy Scout. He loved skiing and mountain climbing, and both boys had kayaks that they paddled on the



Jimmy Johnston's Band with Jim on tenor saxophone at the far left.



With a squirrel in the Oregon woods

Washougal River where Dad had built a small cabin. Mitchell was more into fishing, and he and “Pop,” your grandfather who was a member of the rod and reel club, would go fishing together all the time.

Jim was President of the student body in high school and graduated with very good grades. His advisor told him as student body president that he should take a light course load because of all the extra things he would have to do. But there were some courses he was particularly interested in, and he took an even heavier load than normal that year.

He was in R.O.T.C.; and after joining the Army, he went to Fort Benning, Georgia for officer’s school. He would often drive up to visit your family in Columbia [Tennessee] on weekends.

Then the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.

At first he thought about being a pilot, but he did not have a mechanical aptitude like his brother Mitchell. He kept failing his flying tests, and the senior instructor got frustrated and told him that he would take him up personally, show him how to fly, and make sure that he would pass the tests. So Jim and this instructor took the plane up. When they finally got back down, the instructor gladly admitted that maybe Jim was not cut out to be a pilot. That was the end of his flying career.

But Mitchell was very mechanical and good with his hands, and went on to become a carrier pilot [in Butch O'Hare's squadron] and a Navy Ace in the Pacific.

When he was stationed at Ft. Lewis, Jim got a sailboat and sailed it on Lake Washington or one of the many lakes in that area.

He met his wife "Mac" at a USO dance and fell madly in love. They were married three months before he shipped out. She is a wonderful lady, and



Major (then Capt.) James V. "Jim" Johnston of the 84th Infantry Division with brother and Navy Ace—Cmdr. (then Lt.) John Mitchell "Mitch" Johnston of the Hornet's Navy Fighter Squadron Photos courtesy of Peggy Johnston Gould





Major (then Capt.) Johnston with his new bride "Mac"

we have been friends ever since.

Your grandfather moved the family from Tennessee to the west coast for his health where your dad, Baker Sr., his brothers Bill and John, and Margret my mother, all grew up. Two cousins from Tennessee, William and Frank Ewing, also came out to live with us after their mother died young. Another cousin, Fred McGavock, also moved out west to join us.



Then Mom married my dad Jack, and they had the three of us. I bring all this up to say that it was sort of a big extended family with all of us living closely with brothers, cousins, uncles, and aunts all going through the Depression together. Jim's wife Mac eventually remarried and still lives out there with her kids, and we all still stay in touch.

Even though your dad moved back in the 30's to settle in Tennessee, he and I, and your mother, were always very close. But after Jim died we never talked about him again. He and your Dad were so close, and I think it would have been very hard for him. I'm really glad that you are putting this together so our children will get some idea of what Jim and Mitchell and all those people were like. You should do another one about your dad.

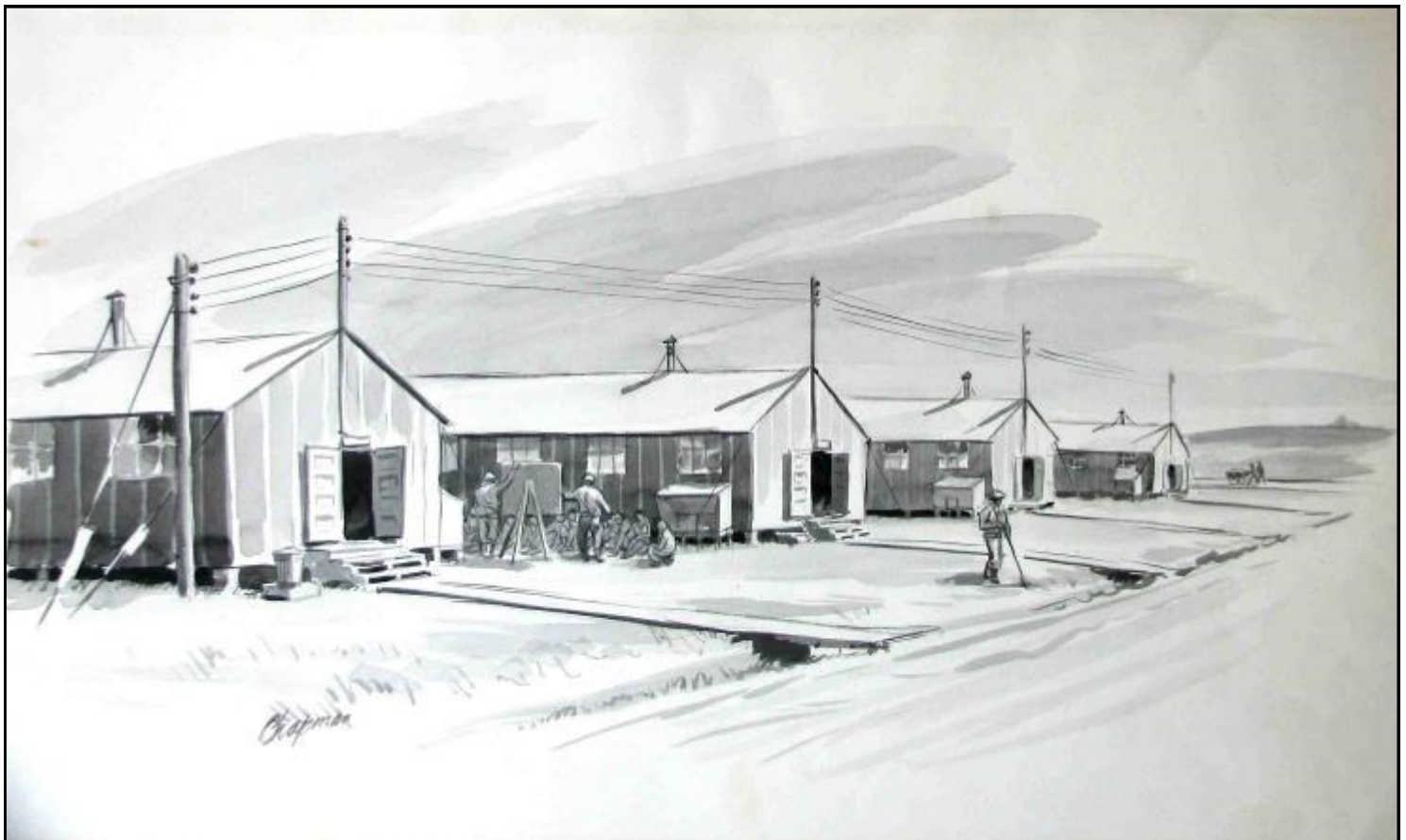
You mentioned that all of Jim's Army friends were curious and asked questions about his growing up, his childhood, and what influenced him to become the sort of person he was.

What was there in his background that led to his achievements when he went over to Europe?

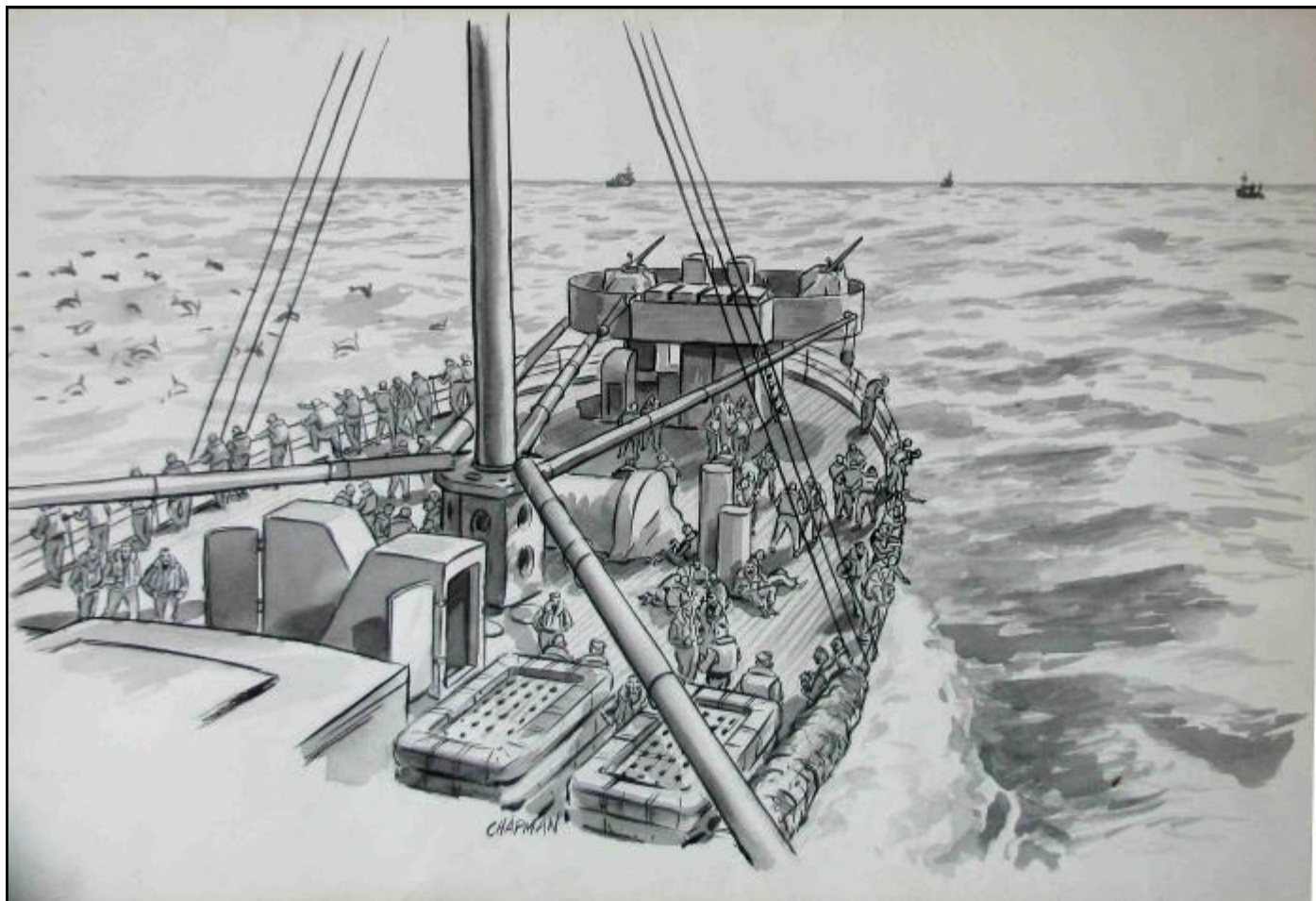
I think it was just being raised in a close, loving family.

But for me, the question has always been, "What could Jim have achieved if he had come back?"

Company H training in Texas



The transport was too crowded and Company H had to sleep on deck.

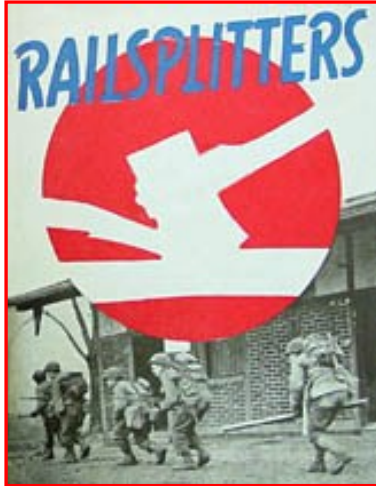


A mortar in action.



Watercolors by
Sgt. Walter Chapman,
Co. H, 334th Regt.,
84th I.D.

"Railsplitters" is a small booklet covering the history of the 84th Infantry Division. This booklet is one of the series of [G.I. Stories](#) published by the Stars & Stripes in Paris in 1944-1945.



***T**he following story is of you, actions and accomplishments to date. Much history is yet to be made. Mere human words cannot express the valor, human effort and suffering necessary for the writing of your glorious history on the pages of life's book, but I, as your commanding general, am deeply aware of your faith and courage. Many of our comrades have made the supreme sacrifice on the field of battle. To them we dedicate this booklet and for them we will complete our final mission.*

A.R. Bolling
Major General, Commanding

...Railsplitters had unfinished business -- taking Wurm and Mullendorf. First Bn., 334th, cleaned up Wurth in less than two hours Dec. 18. German prisoners complained of the paralyzing artillery barrage preceding the infantry attack. While 1st Bn. was taking Wurm, Maj. (then Capt.) James V. Johnston, Portland, Ore., led 2nd Bn. against Mullendorf. Within 15 minutes, the major, a six-shooter swinging from his hip, strolled from Nazi headquarters, smoking a cigar and carrying a Nazi party flag...



Part 26 of 30: Oregon Staters and the War in Europe

By George Edmonston Jr. and Tom Bennett

"Jimmy Johnson, '39, the "pint-sized, one-man army."

"And near the small town of Homberg, the 84th lost one of its most colorful figures and one of Don Coon's best friends...Maj. Jimmy Johnston, a fellow Beaver from the class of 1939, the fiery little commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion of the 334th Infantry Regiment, the one everyone referred to as a "pint-size, one-man army." Only five-foot-five on a good day, Jimmy's exploits were legendary. Leading his men into battle, he always carried a .45 [revolver] on his hip, a German P-38 pistol in a shoulder holster, and a rifle in his hand. His jeep was equipped with a submachine gun and sawed-off shotgun. Fearless, he led what he called "march fire" assaults, lead flying everywhere and deadly to the enemy. In one attack alone, he killed or captured over 108 German soldiers, but on March 4, 1945, Jimmy's luck finally ran out as he died as he lived, killed by a direct hit from a Nazi "88" mounted on a Tiger Tank."

The Sunday Oregonian

VOL. LXIV—NO. 3 SECTION ONE PORTLAND, OREGON, JANUARY 21, 1945 CITY EDITION 8 SECTIONS

Portland Mite 1-Man Army

Six-Gun Technique Used on Germans

BY KENNETH L. DIXON,

Associated Press Staff Writer

ON THE BELGIAN FRONT, Jan. 18 (delayed) (AP)—It took nearly six years and transfers through six outfits for Capt. James V. Johnston to reach combat, but once he did the pint-sized ball of fire from Portland, Or., became a literal legend in less than six weeks. Weighing 127 pounds (with



Capt. Johnston

equipment) and standing 5 feet 5 inches tall, he so distinguished himself in his first action that on the third day he was given temporary command of his battalion when the commander was wounded.

In the last two months he has commanded an infantry battalion four times — a job which calls normally for a lieutenant-colonel.

Six-Gun Artistry Employed

He has led half a dozen "march fire" assaults which consist of firing from the hip on the run as the doughboys break out of cover to attack.

Also, he has killed countless Germans with various weapons—three by thumb-fanning his old .45 while riding a jeep and others with implements varying from hand grenades to a borrowed tank.

Jim was too long getting into action to pay much attention to standard procedures. Twenty-eight years old, he was graduated from Oregon State college in 1939, entered the Army as second lieutenant in the reserved corps and joined the 15th infantry regiment.

He served with the amphibious command, army air force, and the infantry replacement training center at Fort Benning, Ga., before joining the 84th divi-

sion last March.

Whole Company Saved

He was made commanding officer of a headquarters company but his request for line duty brought him transfer to a heavy-weapons company [Co. H, 334 Regt., 84th ID].

In his first action near Geilenkirchen, Germany, shortly after he was ordered to take over the outfit, he was ordered to pull a company out of a trap. He crawled 1200 yards across an open field under heavy machine-gun and sniper fire. After dark, he guided the whole outfit safely to a reinforced position.

Near Gereonsweiler, Germany, he led an attack which jumped off at 6 A. M. By noon he held the objective after killing 20 Germans and capturing 86 prisoners.

In the same sector his men were once held up by machine-gun fire. Crawling to a tank, Johnston directed the driver to within 50 yards of the enemy position and opened fire with the tank's .75, killing seven Germans.

Flag and Cigar Captured

During the Mullendorf attack he led the way, running and firing machine pistols. Fifteen minutes after the jump-off he walked down the steps of the erstwhile enemy headquarters with the Nazis' flag under one arm and a cigar in his mouth. In taking 88 prisoners and 16 pillboxes, his battalion had lost two men killed and six wounded.

"It was because we used 'march fire' all the way," said Johnston.

His most typical deed came when the battalion was losing equipment to a mine field through which a supply line was running to reach combat fighters. He took a trench knife and cleared a pathway through the field.

Hidden Explosives Found

Next day engineers working with mechanical detectors found 18 separate explosives under the snow, right where he had been crawling along, probing for and removing mines.

Capt. Johnston is the son of

Mr. and Mrs. James V. Johnston, 2106 N. E. 26th avenue. His wife resides at Dotham Ala.

The .45-caliber gun he used to kill Germans was a gift from his father, who taught him how to fan a six-gun.

His brother, John Mitchell Johnston, a lieutenant (jg) navy fighter pilot, is one of eight remaining pilots out of the original 36 in the famous Butch O'Hare squadron [VF-3].

[Editor's Note. After this article was written, Lt. Johnston was assigned to VBF-17 on the carrier *Hornet*. "16 Apr 1945: Lieutenant John Mitchell Johnston became an Ace when he shot down four Zekes (zeros), bringing his total to eight aircraft. For his action during this engagement he was awarded the Silver Star." From *Dictionary of American Naval Aviation Squadrons*-Volume 1.]

Brother and navy fighter Ace Lt. John "Mitch" Johnston on a Grumman F6F Hellcat. Of short stature like his brother, his nickname in the squadron was "Super Mouse."



From Sgt. Pflum:

"I was a machine gun sergeant in the 2nd Platoon of H Company, 334th Regt. Our company commander was your Jim Johnston. Capt. Johnston made a deep impression on you at the first time you saw him. He was an ideal combat commander.

Our battalion commander... was replaced by Jim Johnston who was promoted to Major. Major Johnston was killed while being "in the field" commanding his battalion. Major Johnston had the respect of all his officers and enlisted men, he was a hellova combat commander. I do not know of a better description to give you"

Correspondence to Baker Mitchell from Bob Pflum, September, 2006



MARCHING FIRE

(This story originally appeared in Stars and Stripes on January 14, 1945.)

THE Queen of Battle is climbing on the marching fire bandwagon. After riding assault fire long and hard, the footsloggers discovered that by keeping a lot of lead bees buzzing over Jerry's iron bonnet he can be kept hunkered down. Too busy ducking to fire back. Even vaunted toughies of Hitler wilt under this form of infantry advance.

Former shoe clerks, filling station workers and the medley of other American boys who are kneaded into the Infantry were taught in the States to rush forward, hit the dirt, fire a few rounds, then repeat. When the enemy was only fifty to seventy-five yards away the order switched to assault fire. Then it was shoot, keep shooting, until the enemy is close enough for a carving job with the bayonet.

Used in 1918

Over here the men leading the heart and guts of our army discovered that

by dosing the air with lead pellets all the way, from where the attack is launched to the objective, the Nazis don't fight back. It was a method to reduce our casualties to a pleasing minimum and bulge our Pee Wee camps with prisoners. It was employing in war the aim of all American sports — keep possession of the ball, attack all the time, the best defense is constant, unrelenting attack.

Marching fire is nothing new. It was taught to the fathers of the lads nipping the bulges the common enemy prodded into our lines. In the Argonne Forest the doughboys of World War I muted some of the Kaiser's best by keeping a constant stream of bullets heading toward German limes. The method was considered good enough to be put into the IR in 1920. Then, for some reason, it was shoved into the background and assault fire stressed. The current edition of our Infantry was taught to creep like a baby, or crawl

like a snake, remembering to keep the tail down, way down.

General Patton, "Old Blood and Guts," is a booster of this method of combat. He used it with great success in Africa and Sicily. Before his men hopped the Channel from England to France they were taught marching fire, worked out field problems in this "keep moving and firing" type of warfare.

There is nothing mysterious about marching fire, no hocus pocus, no intricate methods that would take a long time to teach veterans or reinforcements. It means that platoon and company commanders have to see that every man in the attack has three or four extra bandoliers of ammo slung over his shoulder. Then, when the order comes to move on Jerry they fire, walk six or seven paces, fire again, and repeat all the way to the Jerry lines. That it cuts casualties and folds the supermen is supported by the statement made by Colonel Craybill, commanding officer of the 329th Infantry. He says:

MARCHING FIRE (cont.)

"We have proved marching fire to be very effective in closing with the enemy and preventing him from using his light automatic weapons. On one occasion we actually came up to a trench in which the Germans were sitting in the bottom of the trench, and crying because they dared not get up to use their weapons. Our losses were negligible. If we had not used marching fire we would probably have received heavy fire from the trench as we closed in."

Fire Straight To Front.

His officers have this collective opinion of marching fire:

"Marching fire has saved us casualties by making Jerry keep his head down. When we use it every man begins by firing one full clip of magazine from whatever weapon he is armed with. Company I on one occasion used it against an enemy force which was dug in 500 yards away behind a stone wall. Our troop had to cross a wide open field. The attack was started by a flare signal. Every man came up and fired a full clip, and then continued to fire as he advanced. We did not have a casualty and took 400 prisoners whom we found crouched down in their holes."

It's good in woods as well as open terrain. Not the dense fir forests up Hurtgen way, but the more open kind. A report by the commanding officer of Co I, 179th Infantry Regiment, is a good pattern for marching fire in woods: It reads:

"When attacking in woods, we issue each rifleman three or four extra bandoliers of ammunition and form a skirmish line at wide intervals. After the supporting fire has been lifted, the men advance, covering the area straight ahead with as much fire as possible. In one instance we were sent in to take an objective which another unit could not take. We used this method, took the objective and had only two wounded men."

Front line observers say that marching fire in woods tends to confuse the Jerries. The fear of the unknown, the eerie b-z-z-w-e-e of bullets ricocheting from trees, and the healthy respect Hums have for our small

arms spitting hot lead constantly adds to one theory. That is, Get the enemy without getting hurt.

Move Fast In Open

The head of the Combat Lessons Branch said his front line observers have talked with outfits that used marching fire at night with outstanding success. Tracers mixed generously with ordinary ammo are damn good for us but snafu for Jerry psychological effect. The sight of the tracers cutting a flaming pattern toward Jerry perks our boys' morale better than in-the-flesh-appearance of pin-up Chili Williams. And Jerry, seeing a confusing pattern



of death streaking his way, ducks and stays ducked until he finds himself looking up into the face of a Joe from Kokomo, or elsewhere, U.S.A.

A PFC assistant squad leader with the 313th Infantry, has this sage observation to pass on. "When attacking across open fields pick the best route available and then move fast and keep firing. If brought under fire, mortar or artillery, continue to move forward. Do not freeze, and get as close to Jerry as possible as he seldom shells close to his own men. Continue to fire on the enemy position whether you see it or not. A large volume of fire will keep him in his hole until you get there."

Germans have a healthy respect for the M-1. In shorter ranges, where the attack employing marching fire is

launched from three hundred yards or less, the carbine, with its muzzle velocity of 1,900 feet per second, commands as much respect. So do the automatic weapons. Marching fire can make full use of all the portable weapons that our army has. A unit of the 83rd Infantry Division in its training pamphlet stresses that. An extract from that pamphlet states:

"Automatic riflemen and rifle men with bayonets fixed, all taking full advantage of existing cover, advance rapidly toward the enemy. They fire at a rapid rate at areas known or believed to be occupied by hostile personnel."

No Good for Pillboxes

The unit modestly claims it can out-yell, out-fight, out-shoot and out-bayonet the Jerry. And the claim is premised on marching fire.

Marching fire can't button up a pillbox. Nor is it good for street fighting, where every house is suspect as a hornet's nest of Germans. Those situations call for other tactics.

{But} when the way is straight ahead, over open fields or woods that are not too dense, the combat tip of a muddy youngster who has lived through an inferno of war from Normandy to Germany is well for all doughfeet to remember:

"... Don't forget marching fire. Keep pouring the lead at him. It's a power play with us keeping the ball all the way."





Watercolor by
Sgt. Walter Chapman,
Co. H, 334th Regt.,
84th I.D.

The Ardennes, January, 1945. The only way to get the wounded out!



“The Three Characters”

Lt. Griffith (with top-hat and cane), Lt. Schape, Major Johnston (with S&W 1917 revolver).
Photo and title by PFC. Frank Ruskiewicz, Undated, but probably in late Feb., 1945.



PFC. Frank Ruskiewicz was in 2nd Bn, 334th Reg., 84th ID and was an amateur photographer. Photo scans courtesy of his son, Dick Ruswick.



Photo from 84th archived scrapbook.

Art of the 84th, by Sgt. Walter Chapman



Mo Miller in a typical German Village



Sgt. Walter Chapman, Mortar squad, Company H, 334rd Regt. at his studio in Sylvania, Ohio. September, 2007.

Baker Mitchell (left) is holding the picture of Mo Miller that was on the cover of the Division's History by Draper. In the center is Walt's wife Jean. She remembered that Walt's brother Fred was on the aircraft carrier Hornet with Jimmy's brother Mitch.

With Sgt. Chapman September, 2007

Sylvania I graduated from the Cleveland Art Institute in 1931 and did freelance art for a while. It was the Depression, and I landed a WPA job doing a giant sixty-foot mural for the library at the university. My friend and I stretched that job out for a few years, and then I landed a great job as an artist and illustrator in New York. There I was living the high life on \$350 a week – a fortune for those days. I had a nice apartment on 40th and a Packard convertible; but then one day in 1943, I got a letter...“Greetings!” I suddenly went to earning \$21 a month!

I was in your cousin's Company H in a mortar squad... We soon figured out how to go through the pill boxes of the Siegfried Line; we'd get everyone firing into the slits and send up two guys with flame throwers and burn them out. We burned up a lot of Germans that fall. I was very lucky. I was right next to guys who were injured real bad, and I was a forward observer many times – a dangerous job. I even got bullet holes in my clothes, but I was lucky -never a scratch.

After the Ardennes, I was pulled out to be with Mo Miller, who was a photographer, and with Draper to help do illustrations for the division's paper the “Railsplitter” and for “Stars and Stripes.” Mo is the one who took the picture of Captain Johnston with his .45 revolver. Then I did those pieces for the division's history book.

When I first heard about my new assignment I thought, “Oh, boy! I won't have to be up front getting shot at all the time!” But was I wrong. I spent more time on the line than ever getting the scenes they wanted. Sometimes I would be trying to

get in position to get a good view of a scene and realize that I had become the target.

For example, we were attacking to get control of a bridge crossing the Rhine. To sketch the bridge and show both sides of the river during the battle, I had to make my way down to our edge of the riverbank several hundred yards away to the south. As I was concentrating on my sketching, I gradually became aware that artillery shells were beginning to drop closer and closer to me. Then I realized that the Germans thought I was a spotter and were trying to take me out! I finished that sketch later from memory!

I painted the artwork that you have in 1945 for Draper's history of the Division. I used Mo as the model for the infantryman on the cover illustration, but most of the pieces I painted later from sketches that I had made at the scene. For example, the picture of the wounded being evacuated by the horse-drawn sled was from a sketch I did in the Ardennes. That was the only way we had of getting the wounded out at that time.

During our chat, Walt's wife Jean remembered that I had mentioned something about Jimmy's brother John “Mitch” Johnston being a pilot on the aircraft carrier Hornet. “You know,” she said, “Walt's brother Fred was a pilot on the Hornet. I wonder if he knew Mitch?” Jean called Fred in Marblehead and while we chatted, Fred found Mitch's picture in his collections. They were both F6F Hellcat fighter pilots in the VBF-17 squadron on the Hornet. What an amazing coincidence! Two sets of brothers in the same units half

a world apart: Walt and Jimmy in Company H in Europe and Fred and Mitch in VBF-17 in the Pacific!

“Mitch was an ‘Ace’ with eight planes destroyed. I destroyed seven planes and two trains, so if they had counted two trains as equaling one plane, I could have been an Ace, too,” Fred wryly cracked!

Fred is also an artist and did a memorial piece for the Hornet's museum in San Diego. It shows four Hellcats in formation flying over the Hornet while under way. After a nice talk with Fred on the phone, we all went to dinner at the Chapman's favorite restaurant.

There, I told Walt that after meeting many of the 84th's men at the Nashville reunion, I thought that they were all amazing heroes for what they did and that Jimmy was one more great guy trying to do his job like all the rest.

No, your cousin was different... he went about doing things in a different way. I was not personally around him that much, but there was a feeling in the whole company that he was a very different sort. I think maybe that feeling was more than just company wide – remember that General Bolling named the division's stadium in Salzwedel after him and had a dedication ceremony for the entire division in his honor. He was different. I would give anything to learn what his boyhood was like and how he grew up to be what he was.

Art of the 84th, by Sgt. Walter Chapman



The Ardennes
January , 1945

Watercolors by
Sgt. Walter Chapman,
Co. H, 334th Regt.,
84th I.D.



3rd Battalion., 334th, Crossing the Roer River, February, 1945

Draper (p. 120) writes that near Berismenil during the Battle of the Bulge, *The 334th's Battalion Commander, Captain James V. Johnston*, once said wistfully : "Every time I see a hill, I know it's going to be our next objective."



Cpl. Art Mahler, 2 Bn. Interpreter, Co. E
84th ID Reunion, Nashville, TN
September 2, 2006



With Corporal Mahler

Nashville Although I spoke French and Germany as my native language, they put me in E Company as a rifleman. But they did not have enough interpreters, so they kept pulling me back to headquarters to question the prisoners or locals. I saw Major Johnston regularly on these trips.

Ah, the Major was a great guy. Everybody liked the Major. I was a PFC, but he knew me and called me "Art."

I was a replacement and joined the unit just before Thanksgiving. I was "dug in" alongside the rest of the rifle squad because the company was pinned down by two machine guns with overlapping fields of fire and we could not advance. Artillery was beginning to find us and we had to do something. I say "dug in" but the despite all the mud, under about 5 inches of mud the ground was hard as concrete. As I looked out of my shallow hole, I see a guy run up to a tank—it was a Sherman of the British Sherwood Rangers—and climb up on it. The tank commander pops up and the guy points out the machine guns. The tank moves up and takes them both out with the guy and the commander direct-

ing fire. The guy that climbed on the tank was your Major Johnston!

One afternoon we were in a column going down a road near Cielles that the engineers had cleared of mines, but it was snow-covered ice. A vehicle slid off the road and hit a mine on the shoulder. (see Wolff, p.63) Several guys were hurt, and we had to get to them. The Major was down on his knees probing in the snow for other mines with his bayonet.

I got down and began probing through the snow with him.

He turned and looked at me. "Art," he said, "you don't have to do this." That's how he was. If it needed doing, he would do it.

One night after we had all been advancing under fire and without much sleep for several days, I was awakened and told to go to a nearby cellar where a reconnaissance patrol was being put together to locate the road to the next town. It was cold and we were all tired, but I was the only one who could read the street signs to figure out how to get

on the right road for the morning's advance.

I made it to the cellar and there were several guys assembling for the patrol. As we were waiting to move out, in walks Major Johnston with flashlights and maps and he actually led the patrol. He was going to make darnn sure that we had good support to find the right road when the entire unit moved out in the morning.

Once, I was posted as sentry, and we began taking sniper fire outside a house that was going to be used for a staff meeting. As he came into the house he said, "Art, get some cover." I guess he thought we already knew there were Germans around.

I didn't think of him as being "cocky,." He was a gutsy guy and did what had to be done.

At first I thought being an interpreter would keep me off the front line, but there weren't enough interpreters. So even though whatever unit I was with would be rotated back, I would have to stay up on the line with the unit that rotated in, and the next unit rotated in, and the next... I just seemed to stay on the line.

After we crossed the Rhine, the Allied assault was spearheaded by the Ninth Army; and we in the 84th were in the front of the column after the breakthrough. Our tanks would come to the outskirts of a town or city, and people would be in all the windows looking out. The officers were worried that some might be snipers or that our men might shoot some of the civilians so they would call for me to walk ahead of the lead tank and yell at the people to get back from the windows.

So I, PFC Art Mahler, lead the entire Ninth Army through the towns into the heart of Germany.

Nashville, Tennessee September 2, 2006
As told to Baker Mitchell



“We began taking sniper fire outside a house...”

272489

INFANTRYMEN OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 334TH
INFANTRY REGT. CROUCH IN THE SHELTER OF
VEHICLES TO AVOID SHRAPNEL AND SNIPER FIRE
IN A MODEL GERMAN VILLAGE ON THE FRONT
LINES IN GERMANY. 2/28/45.

US ARMY PHOTOGRAPH



PFC Marvin Korte, Co. H, 334 Regt.
84th ID Reunion, Branson, MO
August 31, 2008

With PFC Korte

Branson

Capt. Johnston was killed right as we were at the Rhine in March. I know most of us guys never thought that he would make it that long.

He was always up trying to see what was going on.

My machine gun position was usually right up on the line. We always thought that we were the very front, but one time I looked out and saw Capt. Johnston well in front of us.

If General Church asked Capt. Johnston if he thought he could lead the battalion to the Rhine, there is no doubt what Capt. Johnston replied.

Branson, MO August 31, 2008. As told to Baker Mitchell

On December 18 after the battle, Wolff writes: *Suddenly the men discovered “it was all over” as Major James V. Johnston, Battalion CO, rushed to the last trench and told the men, “You did a great job. We’ve got Mullendorf. Set up for a counter-attack.”*



Lt. H. C. “Brick” Bradford,
Platoon Leader, 2nd platoon, H company,
2nd Bn., 334th Regt., 84th ID
84th ID Reunion, Nashville, TN



Approaching the Roer River—Prelude to Task Force Church

With Lt. Bradford

Nashville In the beginning, he was the captain of H Company and I was one of his platoon leaders. We were a heavy weapons company with machine guns and mortars. We called him “Jug.”

As senior captain in the battalion, whenever the battalion CO was injured he would be moved up to take the battalion until a new CO could get in place.

He was up and down so many times they finally made him a major and battalion executive officer.

It was March 4, and we were south of Moers approaching the Rhine River as part of General Church’s task force. Task Force Church had formed up as soon as we had crossed the Roer, and we had punched through in a breakout 50-mile race to the Rhine.

We had about 2,000 yards to go to reach the Rhine and ran into some defensive positions.

The replacement battalion CO had come over from the 106nd ID that had really gotten shot up. When we hit the German defenses about nine o’clock that night, he pulled us up and called a staff meeting to discuss the situation. Until then, we had been charging hard, keeping the krauts knocked back on their heels, but the Colonel was being cautious and wanted to stop

for the night to resume the attack in the morning after reconnoitering the defenses more thoroughly.

In that staff meeting, Jug reached back and pulled my sleeve. I leaned over; and he whispered, “Brad, get your ass out there and find Church and see what we’re really supposed to be doing.”

I slipped out of the meeting and finally located General Church and told him that it looked like we were going to hold up for the night. He asked me if I could find my way back to the meeting with him, and I led him back to our guys.

So General Church came into the back of the room and went over to Jug and asked him if he thought he could get to the river that night, and Jug said he thought that he could.

He then moved through the small crowd up to the battalion commander and said, “Colonel, please come with me.”

That was the smoothest relief I ever saw done in my entire time in the army.

So Jug formed up the battalion behind some tanks—it was about 10 or 11 PM by this time—and he was up on foot up with the tanks so he could see what was going on to direct the battalion’s final assault to the Rhine River.

The Germans had begun shelling the road, and I was back in the column and

heard the word come back that the Major had got it.

I went up to where he was. An 88 shell had hit the road right in front of him and he was pretty messed up. He was still warm when I got there, and I rolled him in a shelter half and put him on my jeep.

I don’t think I realized exactly what I was doing, but I slipped his wedding ring off and put it in my pocket and carried him back to HQ.

After the war, I tried locating his wife but could not track her down. Every few years, I would try again; and finally in 1996, I was able to locate his wife’s brother in Alabama. He gave me her information, and Judy and I went out to visit her at her home in Portland.

After the war, she finally remarried and had two sons. She had taken her sons to Holland to visit Jimmy’s grave at Margraten. Her husband had since died, and I gave her the ring.

Nashville, Tennessee September 2, 2006
As told to Baker Mitchell



L to R: Capt. Aistracht, G Co, Lt. Mullins, Maj. Johnston, killed in action, Mors am Rein 4 March 1945, Capt. S. Stone, killed in action outside of Hanover, 9 April 19, Lt. Col. Umanoff, CO 2nd Bn. To March 4, 1945.

Photo by PFC. Frank Ruszkiewicz



Lt. Bradford, Sgt. Fochesato, Dec.44, Barvaux, Belgium; North of Marche Fochesato received battlefield commission to 2nd Lt. KIA 3/1/45



Lt. H. C. "Brick" Bradford, Aug. 45 Phillipsburg, Germany

The Oregonian

VOL. LXXXV_NO. 26,341 PORTLAND, OREGON TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 1945 CITY EDITION 18 PAGES PRICE FIVE CENTS

Nazi 88 Shell Ends Career of Oregon's 'Ball of Fire'

BY WES GALLAGHER

Associated Press Staff Writer
(substituting for Kenneth L. Dixon)

IN GERMANY, Mar. 27 (Delayed) (AP)—The Western Front's Three-Gun Indestructible Midget Is Dead.

He died as he sometimes expressed the hope he would — by a direct hit from an 88.

He was Maj. James V. Johnston, 28, five feet, five inches, fighting machine from (2106 Northeast 26th Avenue), Portland, Or., who in a few short weeks had become a legend with the 84th infantry division.

No one knows how many Germans he disposed of. In one attack alone, he killed 20 and captured 88. He was in the forefront of every fight the division had.

His only decoration was a bronze star. And he threw that away when he heard it had been given to officers who never had been in combat and held desk jobs.

Johnston carried a .45 [Smith and Wesson Model of 1917 6-shot revolver] on his hip. He fired it by "fanning" the hammer in the old western style. On his shoulder he carried a German P-38 pistol. In his hand he carried a Springfield rifle. He kept a submachine gun and a sawed-off shotgun in his jeep. He used them all.

On one occasion he climbed into a tank in the midst of a battle and fired its 75 millimeter gun.

Even with all his shooting irons, Johnston weighed only 127 pounds.

Colorful and cocky, he won the adoration of his men the first time he went into battle.

When his company fell into a trap near Geilenkirchen during the division's first action, Johnston brought them out by crawling 1,200 yards under sniper and heavy machinegun fire to bring help. On six occasions he led a "march fire" assault — which means firing from the hip in a running attack.

Johnston had his own personal patrol which he led into enemy lines on "dull days."

It's a wonder he lived as he did — men had begun to think of him as indestructible.

His contempt for the enemy was complete. He liked to tell prisoners that "I have been at many country fairs and a half dozen side-shows but I never have seen any [freaks] that could beat you square-heads yet."

His concern for his own troops equaled his dislike of the enemy. He would give shivering doughboys the clothes off his own back—and he always carried k rations. He never ate them himself.

Every man in the battalion was accustomed to pour complaints into his receptive ear.

His habit of walking around nonchalantly under fire made him a choice sniper target. But it took an 88 to kill him with a direct hit.

He died in one of the divi-



Maj. James V. Johnston Jr. of Portland, whose exploits against the Germans made him almost a legendary figure, was killed recently by a German shell while he was leading his troops in action.

sion's last battles before reaching the Rhine.

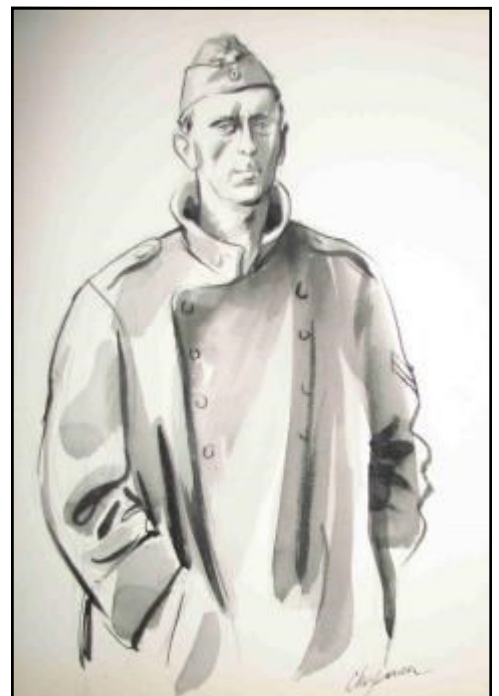
(End advance of AMS of Wednesday March 28 — moved March 26)

(Editors: Kenneth L. Dixon, writing from the Belgian front, devoted his Jan. 20 column to the story of Maj. (then Captain) James V. Johnston of Portland, Ore., a "pint-sized ball of fire" who in less than six weeks had become a frontline legend for his fighting ability and leadership of men. Today Wes Gallagher tells the rest of Johnston's short, but brilliant story.)- - -

Headquarters, 84th Infantry Division, Krefeld, Germany, 1945



German prisoners
1945





THE RAILSPLITTER



VOLUME 3

SOMEWHERE IN GERMANY, MAY 15, 1945

NUMBER 7

Club Parley Slated

Four on Way To States

At least four Railsplitters today were on their way to the States and discharged under the army's point system.

They are M/Sgt. Elmer Cassidy of Box 312, Bismarck, N. D., sergeant major of the 335th Infantry; M/Sgt. Isadore Seidel of 2215 N. 16th St., Milwaukee, Wis., sergeant major of the 333rd Infantry; S/Sgt. Paul C. Schiffman of Lamberton, Minn., a member of the 309th Medical Battalion, and Pfc. Felipe Amezaaga of 530 W. 112th St.

(Continued on Page 8)

Special Service To Produce Play

The Special Service Section announced today that it will produce the Broadway success, "The Milky Way," in the near future.

The Section is anxious to interview anyone in the Division who has had any experience on the stage and would be interested in taking part in the production.

Set designers and persons with experience at making scenery are also needed.

The play will be produced by Lt. Bill Chalmers, assistant Special Service officer, and will be under the direction of Sgt. Carleton Wiggins.

ETO REUNION . . .



The first persons Pvt. Gordon Brattain, center, met after his liberation from the Germans were a couple of friends from his home town of Noblesville, Ind., Lt. Charles A. Wann and First Sgt. Joseph L. Casey of the 638th Tank Destroyers. Brattain was captured at Salerno.

Ardennes Story Best, Says General

The commander of the VII Corps, Lt. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, today praised the Historical Section's booklet, "Battle of the Ardennes," as "the best thing of its sort" he has seen published by any division.

The letter, which was addressed to Maj. Gen. A. R. Bolling, reads:

(Continued on Page 8)

Both O's Em's To Serve

Another step toward organization of a Railsplitters Club was taken today with publication of a plan to form an 84th Infantry Division Society organizing committee.

After its selection, the committee will meet at a place to be specified at 7 p. m. next Monday. A qualified temporary organizer-advisor will be available.

(Continued on Page 8)

Results 'Excellent' On Record Raid

Results of yesterday's record Super Fortress attack on Nagoya were excellent, the 20th Bomber Command said today.

After the first wave of bombers had passed over their targets, the factories below were hidden under billowing clouds of smoke.

Little Opposition

All but two of the 500 Super Forts taking part in the raid returned, the announcement said. A third was shot down near Iwo Jima, but the crew

(Continued on Page 8)

Johnston Stadium Dedicated

Johnston Stadium—first memorial erected by the 84th in Germany—was dedicated to the memory of Major James V. Johnston, fiery little commanding officer of the Second Battalion, 334th Infantry, who died in action leading his men to victory in Germany.

Those same men—many of them—stood in trim ranks on the athletic field in front of the stadium and in silence heard Major General A. R. Bolling eulogize their fallen leader.

"Every inch of his 5-foot-5 inch frame was that of a soldier," General Bolling said.

Highlight of the ceremony, held under a cloudless summer sky, was the presen-

tation of an American flag to Major Eugene W. Hubert Jr., battalion commander, by the women at the Salzweidel camp. Major Hubert in turn presented the flag to General Bolling.

Then, while the late Major Johnston's men stood at attention, a bugler blew to the colors and the flag was raised. Chaplain John A. Morrison spoke a memorial prayer and then the men relaxed as General Bolling called them around him and told them of Major Johnston's gallantry.

"It was Major Johnston who led the Second Battalion in the Division's first night attack near Geilenkirchen. Everyone thought it was impossible, but

he did it and the mission was a success." Major Johnston was later killed at Moers on the Rhine.

Later in the ceremony, General Bolling threw in the first ball to Col. Charles E. Hoy, commanding the 334th Infantry, thus launching the battalion's softball league play.

Other officers present at the dedication included Lt. Col. Thomas W. Woodyard, Jr., 334th Executive Officer; Capt. Joseph Walker, General Bolling's aide, and Capt. Samuel Adams Jr., Second Battalion adjutant.



MAY 12 US ARMY SIGNAL CORP T/5 WM. F. STICKLE 167

STADIUM IS DEDICATED TO MAJ. JAMES JOHNSTON FORMER COMMANDING OFFICER,
2ND BATTALION, 334TH INFANTRY REGIMENT 84TH INFNATRY, [sic] A HERO
FROM PORTLAND, ORE. OFFICERS OF THE DIVISION STAND IN THE FOREGROUND
AT SALZWEDEL, GERMANY.

PASSED FOR PUBLICATION

16 MAY 1945

[signature]

Inscription on back of photograph

“Salzwedel”

**L to R: Maj. Hubert, Capt. Sorahan, Capt.
Adams, Lt. Hutton**

Showing civilian spectators in the background

Photo by PFC. Frank Ruszkiewicz





THE WORLD WAR II HONOR ROLL

James V. Johnston, Jr. Major, U.S. Army

Service # O-024406

Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion
334th Infantry Regiment, 84th Infantry Division

Entered the Service from: Oregon

Died: 4-Mar-45

Buried at: Plot P Row 15 Grave 17

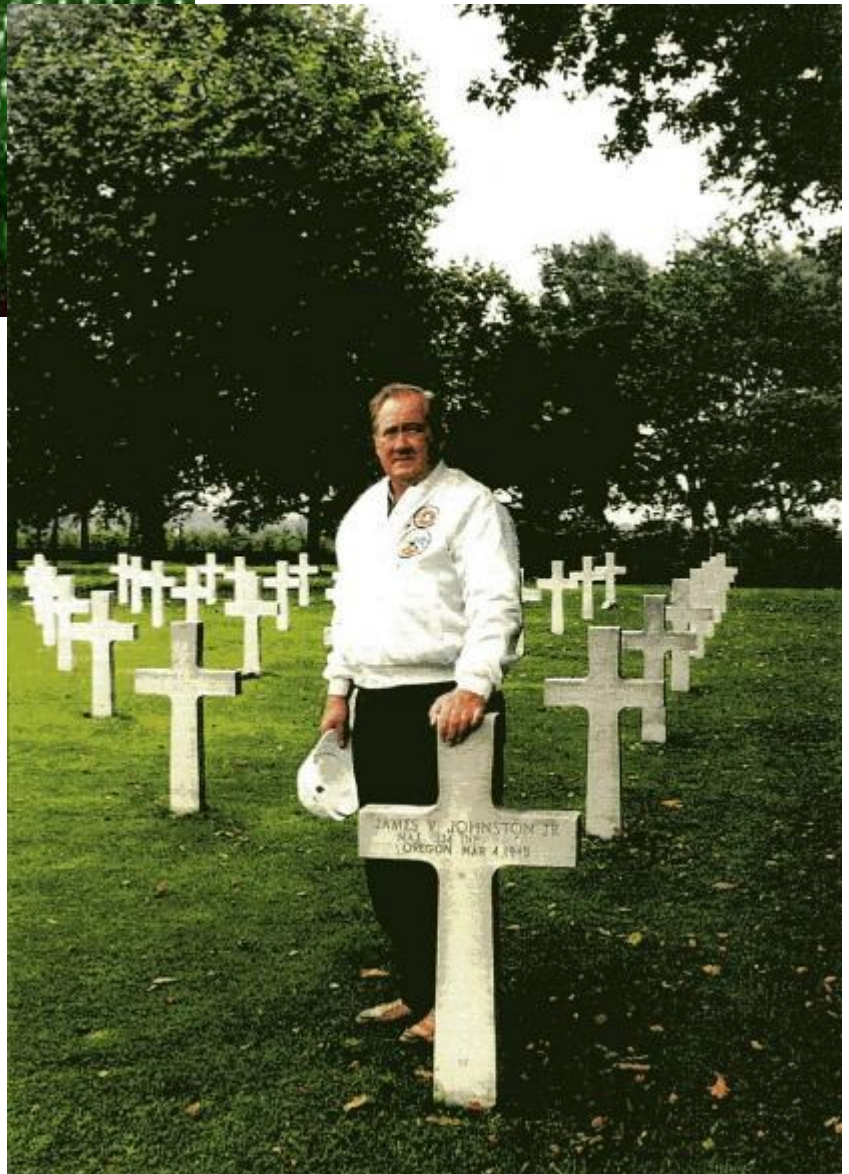
Netherlands American Cemetery

Margraten, Netherlands

Awards: Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart



Margraten, Netherlands



Lt. Bradford and Maj. Johnston