

American Legion Post 56, York Maine Recognizes eight brothers who served in World War II

While the eight Bardsley brothers served in the U.S. Army during World War II, their parents, Harold and Emily Bardsley hung a flag in first floor window of their home at 461 Lincoln St. Waltham, Mass with blue stars on a red and white background honoring their sons in military service.

One cannot imagine the thoughts of Harold and Emily Bardsley who were raising 13 children at their Lincoln St home and having to say goodbye to eight of them in 1941, not knowing if they would ever return,

The Bardsley's relied on humor in response to the call for all eight brothers to enlist in the U.S. Army in 1941. In fact, Theodore "Heck" Bardsley always kidded that, "I didn't join (voluntarily); I was invited to tour Europe, at no cost to me, by President Roosevelt."

Still, World War II was a harrowing experience for all of the Bardsley's. Each time Harold and Emily Bardsley picked up the daily newspaper, turned on the radio or answered the doorbell, they must have feared the worst -- which one or more of their sons perished in battle.

That fear certainly increased after November 1942 and the dreadful news about the "Fighting Sullivans," the five brothers all killed in the Pacific during an attack on their ship, the USS Juneau. Those fears also affected William Bardsley' girlfriend, Edna.

"I used to write to him every day and I still have all of his letters in a box at home," said Edna Bardsley, who married William in 1945, after his honorable discharge and return stateside. "I wrote to him that I wanted to join the Army myself, to be with him, and he said no way."

William Bardsley fought in the African campaign under Gen. Dwight Eisenhower in 1942, and then completed a tour in the European theater, giving him the opportunity to reunite with his younger brothers Walter and Robert.

"Bill walked seven straight days to find his brother Bob in southern France," Edna recalled.

The Bardsleys' sacrifices are remarkable. Military historians verify that the Bardsleys provided the highest number of family members -- eight -- ever to fight in the U.S. military at any one time. The brothers served a combined 338 months and earned 28 medals in total.

Walter Bardsley, like his brother William, received a Purple Heart, and Walter's most significant battlefield action in Germany earned him a Bronze Star.

"Dad was in an area overrun by Germans, and he (and a fellow soldier) tricked 23 Germans into surrendering, because the Germans thought, because of his gunfire, that he was part of a battalion", said Walter Bardsley's son and namesake. In winter 1944, Walter Bardsley fought in the Battle of the Bulge, holding the line along the Belgian-German border against a larger German force.

Three months later, in March 1945, Ted "Heck" Bardsley was stationed near Ludendorf Bridge at Remagen, Germany, and survived attempts by German snipers to destroy that bridge as well as U.S. M24 Chaffee tanks, M8 armored cars, half tracks, jeeps, troop carriers, and 2 1/2-ton trucks managed in the garage.

Heck's son David said his father seldom spoke about what Germany was like for him in the spring of 1945. Likewise, the surviving family of Lewis Bardsley has just a few details of his four years of service. "We knew he fought in the Philippines, in the Army, but he never really talked about it," said Edna G. Bardsley, Lewis Bardsley's widow of 20 years. This is a common thread of many soldiers of many wars and conflicts.

The American Legion Post 56 in York Maine now proudly displays the black-and-white photograph of the eight Bardsleys in the lobby of our new post home. The photograph was taken at a late 1940s induction ceremony at the Waltham Massachusetts American Legion Post 156, from the eldest, Leonard, William, Robert, Lewis, Theodore, Harold, Walter and Raymond. Sadly the only survivor is Ted, who will turn 90 this coming February.

The Bardsleys have been part of the community here in York Maine since 1950. Ted and his wife Doris moved here permanently in January 2006. Ted, Doris and their son David have been active members of Post 56.

In honor of these eight brave men that served our country with such pride we at the American Legion Post 56 has dedicated a walkway located in the commemorative garden at our new post to them. It is called the "Bardsley Walk of Honor". Each brick in the walk will be engraved in memory of, or acknowledgement of, a veteran or loved one. The first eight bricks in the walk are for the Bardsley boys. We are inviting anyone interested to join the American Legion Post 56 in purchasing a brick. Bricks can be purchased at the post for \$100.00. This includes engraving the brick and placement within the walkway. For more information please contact the post at 207-363-0376.