

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

To Ralph McDonald:

Nothing pleases me more as a U.S. Senator than to honor our veterans. You were born on February 8, 1924 in Shawnee, Oklahoma the year Joseph Stalin replaced Vladimir Lenin as the new Soviet leader. The War to End all Wars had been over for 5 years and the world was roaring through the 20s. This would all change with the bank crash, subsequent depression, and finally WWII.

You would enter the Army on May 19, 1943 in Little Rock, Arkansas and go off to basic and follow-on training to become an Infantryman. You would sail to Europe on January 17, 1944 and wait for the 331st Infantry Regiment of the 83rd Division which arrived on April 16, 1944. The 83rd had a rich history in WWI having provided over 195,000 officers and enlisted men as replacements into France.

The initial landing into Normandy, France occurred on June 6, 1944 where over 5,300 ships either delivered over 175,000 troops ashore or provided gun support. Your landing occurred on June 18th and went smoothly until you reached the hedgerows south of Carentan, the precious landing zone for the 101st Airborne Division. These hedgerows were taller than in England giving the advantage to the entrenched German defenders. Just as you broke out of those hedgerows, before taking the St. Lo-Priers Road, enemy artillery rained over you and you received your first of three wounds. The 83rd began an incredible push east across French soil securing village after village until October 7th when it penetrated the Siegfried Line. From there you moved toward Aachen, Germany but had to enter the Hurtgen Forest first. Casualties exceeded D-Day as enemy artillery splintered huge pine trees into flying spears. It was here where you received your second enemy inflicted injury.

Things were going well when Hitler decided to make one last ditch effort. He hurled over 200,000 troops and panzer tanks into the Ardennes Forest beginning what would be known as the Battle of the Bulge. It took every soldier whether he was a cook, mechanic, or supply troop to close the gap before re-entering Germany. The same precious land that was secured back in September had to be retaken and the bodies left behind could now finally be buried. Trench foot took 45,000 men off the battle field in December alone.

Just three weeks before the war ended you were wounded once more. You arrived home on June 11, 1945 five days after Germany surrendered having freed millions from oppression. Were they here today they would all join me in thanking you for your service and more importantly your sacrifice. You are truly a proud member of the Greatest Generation.

Sincerely,

John Boozman
U.S. Senator