

John Rill, WWII Veteran and oldest living member of Post 200



We are always so proud to interview our American Veterans and this Veteran happens to be even more special because he is at present our oldest living Veteran at the Hampstead American Legion Post 200. When we talked with him it was like opening a history book from WWII. He still has a wonderful memory and as of March 29th turned 98 years young. We say that because he lives by himself, still drives, and is very active.

Born in Hampstead to Albert and Laura Rill, he had three brothers and six sisters. John attended Snydersburg School to the 7th grade and then graduated from Manchester High School in 1935 with a class of thirteen girls and three boys. He met his wife Ella at a dance at Buzzard's Glory. They had 5 children. John worked 35 years at National Advertising later known as 3M as a painter and then eventually as a foreman supervisor.

John was drafted into the Army at 26 years old in the fall of 1943. He spent his boot camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama and was immediately shipped overseas to England on The Queen Mary converted cruise liner. He was assigned to H Company, 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment of the 30th Infantry Division. PFC John Rill started as an ammunition bearer in the 120th Infantry Regiment. During a fire fight with many rounds of flying mortar he huddled down where his Sergeant was killed first. Next hit was a gunner and another shot that just missed John. The shot killed the other ammunition bearer. In all they lost a whole section including the Lieutenant and runner of the platoon. A Sergeant took over as the Lieutenant and John was made Corporal and would be the runner for the outfit.

On his way to the Battle of the Bulge, Rill recalls climbing down the side of the ship onto the landing craft and rushing ashore when he arrived on D-Day. The beaches of Normandy showed the heavy damage from the initial landing by the Americans. This was only the beginning for Rill and the other troops. He said the Germans were certainly not happy that they were there and were put right into battle. John recalls moving hedgerow to hedgerow making their way south into France and pushing towards the Siegfried Line. The 120th became part of the Task Force Harrison. They headed from Pontoise northeast of Roye to Peronne, then to Cambrai, and finally Valenciennes where they crossed the Belgian border and became the first to enter Belgium and captured the town of Tourni.

John's fighting continued during the seizure of Kalrath, Germany, in February 1945. Company H machine gunners went towards the end of town to place their automatic fire protection. Rill and his Sergeant found the perfect spot to cover a road leading out of town. The pair received fire from enemy troops and on their own decided to clean out the houses in the way leaving their crew at the machine gun. The two of them went house by house and before they were finished captured 13 German soldiers. For the great heroism they received the Silver Star. Heading north of the Cologne to the Rhine River they crossed on outboards while the Corps artillery hit the opposite side of the river. The Americans were quick to pass. They were so quick they even passed German soldiers on the sides. Later the Germans surrendered to the Americans and were picked up. Weeks passed and the 120th would battle its way to the Elbe River. Rill's Sergeant was hit by fire from a German aircraft strafing the troops. Rill was then made Sergeant. He was called to run wire from the gun emplacements to headquarters so they had radio communication.



After they reached the Elbe River they waited for the war to end. They knew it would be soon. They also waited for the Russians coming in the opposite direction. They were allies but were told not to associate with them. Rill recalls when the War ended he was on a 24 hour pass and everyone went wild! Many of his buddies wanted to go to Paris but John wanted to come home to his wife and children. He came back on the Queen Mary, the same ship that took him over. He received the Combat Infantry Badge, Good Conduct Medal, three Battle stars, and several other medals and ribbons for his service.

John is also credited with civilian volunteer work. He has been a member of the Arcadia volunteer fire department, where he is in its Hall of Fame and received their Volunteer Citizen of the year award. He and his wife Ella ran the bingo at Arcadia for many years. He still goes to play. He also helped run the bingo games at the American Legion in Hampstead Post 200. John has been a member at our Legion for over 50 years.

John enjoys spending time in his massive Iris garden where he is a registered Iris grower. He and his wife had three sons, two daughters, twelve grandchildren, fourteen great grandchildren, and seven great-great grandchildren. He was married for fifty four years to his wife.

John was recently honored as the oldest living member of the Arcadia Volunteer Fire Company and for having three generations of his family who are also members and volunteers for the fire company.

As always, we are so grateful to John for taking time to talk to us about his dedicated service to our country. Our freedom is due to the sacrifices of this wonderful generation of Patriots. God bless you, John Rill.

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