

## John (Jack) Ritter Holum

This is the thirteenth in a series of articles that we hope to publish for years to come. With this series we want to honor Service Members that served our great Nation. As I mentioned in the last article we need your help to honor these fine Americans. If you have someone you would like us to include, please help us research and develop articles. Our email address is mhamlegionpost113@gmail.com

John Riter "Jack" Holum was born on August 14, 1925, in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, his father, Lennie, was 31 and his mother, Elsie, was 33. Jack had one sister, Margaret Ann. Jack lived in town. He grew up in a home on North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. His parents both worked in Mount Horeb, Elsie as the librarian and Lennie worked in the grocery store that was on Main Street.

Jack attended school in Mount Horeb. Jack was like any typical teenager in High School he was involved in numerous activities. In sports Jack managed the basketball team his freshman and sophomore years. In 1941 the team that he was managing made it to the state finals(Photo). It was the first time that the Mount Horeb High School Basketball team had gone to state. Jack's senior year he traded his managerial role for a spot on the team. Jack loved music, he was in band all four years (Band Photo from year book - pause). He also joined the choir his senior year. Jack loved entertainment, his senior year the class put on their senior play, it was directed by Aleta Skaife with caste members, Jack, William Keithley, Ardis Thousand, Betty McSherry, Dale Arneson, June Bakken, Arlene Midthun, Dean Finke, Arlene Marty, Jeanne Mickelson, Joe Green, and Grace Brattlie.

Jack was a vibrant young man, you can see from his senior picture from the yearbook that he was ready to take on whatever the world had to offer(Senior Photo from the yearbook – pause). Jack graduated from Mount Horeb High School in May 1943. In mid-December he received word that he would have to report to Fort Sheridan for induction into the United State Army.

Jack, like so many others went off to Basic Training and advanced training in the infantry. During their training Jack learned marksmanship, became even more physically fit marching and running everywhere, performed hand to hand combat training, and learned about gasses that could be used against them on the battlefield. After completing training it is most likely that Jack moved to Camp Patrick Henry and possibly Camp Kilmer before embarking on a nearly month long hot, cramped ride across the ocean.

As a replacement Jack would not have had much say in where he was going or what he would be doing. He was assigned to the Battalion Headquarters of the 120<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division. Unbeknownst to Jack, he was in the same unit as his classmate Ray Cunneen, who was in I Company and Jack was at the Battalion Headquarters. As the 30<sup>th</sup> Division fought its way across France to defeat the Germans Ray and Jack ran into each other on the battlefield. It's not exactly clear which unit was passing through the others lines but Ray and Jack saw each other and got a chance to say hello. Neither of them knew at the time that they were in the same regiment.

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Several months later Ray had to go back to the Battalion Headquarters and ran into Jack. As the 30<sup>th</sup> Division he 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division fought its way across Northern France they liberated several towns near Paris and then north toward Belgium. The fighting was intense with artillery, mortars gunfire, and strafing from German Aircraft.

As the 30<sup>th</sup> Division made their way from Belgium to Germany they were once again liberating towns along the way. The Division had liberated many of these same towns years earlier in World War I. The fighting grew more intense the closer the 120<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division got to the German border. In March Ray was returning to duty after he was treated for injuries. When he arrived at the Battalion Headquarters to go back to his unit Jack was assigned to take him. This was the last time that Ray and Jack saw each other.

As I mentioned the fighting was extremely intense. The Division crossed the Rhine River into Germany, so the Germans were now fighting for their homeland. To describe the events of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, I have pulled an excerpt from a very lengthy diary written by George Schindler who was assigned to the same outfit as Jack Holum.

“Our company set up headquarters in a small village, Gotterswickerhamm, in a house next to the village church a considerable distance from the Rhine. My friend Jack Holum posted guard at the side door of the house and I was talking to him when a group of about 12 German prisoners were herded into the church to be searched. I told Jack that I would see him later and went to the church to help in the search. Before I left him in the doorway he gave me a letter he had written to his mother and asked me to get it to the mail clerk. I asked him why he couldn't mail it himself and his only answer was that he wanted me to have it in case something happened to him. I tried to explain that chances for me getting hit were as good as his but he insisted and I took the letter. As soon as I reached the church the Germans laid a heavy mortar barrage on us. We took cover in the church and when the barrage ended we continued with the search of the prisoners who were lined up in the church pews. Most of them had only personal items and no weapons.

I returned to the house and found someone at Jack's post in the doorway. He told me that Jack had been hit in the mortar attack. I looked for him and found him lying in the cellar. His face was covered with a blanket but I recognized his boots protruding from under the cover. None of us had slept for quite a while and I guess I was not thinking too clearly. I kicked his boot and made some remark about sleeping on the job when I realized that if he had been hit he would be with the medics and not asleep with his head covered. A small piece of shrapnel had pierced his heart and he had died instantly. I left him and as I walked up the stairs I was reminded of the letter he had given me to mail only a few minutes ago. I felt for the letter in my pocket to make sure I still had it. I knew I would have to mail the last letter he had written to his mother.”

Word of Jack's death reached Ray very soon after this because people in the unit new that Jack and Ray were from the same home town. Ray couldn't stop to go back to the headquarters because the unit was attacking. After the war ended, and Ray was shipping out to come back to the United States someone authorized a jeep driver to take Ray to Margarten Cemetery in the Netherlands where Jack's body had been buried.

As Ray described it he remembers going around a large berm and all you could see for a very long way was headstones lined up marking the graves of American Service Members that had been killed in Europe. He said they had the Row Number and Grave site for Jack and as

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they drove down this lone road there was a young woman on her bike. She stopped them and gave Ray flowers to put on Jack's grave. (PHOTO)

I would like to show you a photo of the cemetery today so that you get an idea of what it looks like with so many of our young Americans buried here in the Netherlands. Each of these crosses represents another young American life lost, a brother, son, sometimes fathers that never had a chance to come back and live out their lives. These young Americans gave their lives for our way of life. We can enjoy the freedoms we have today due to Marines, Soldiers, Airmen, Navy personnel that have given their lives.

If you look up Jack Holum in the cemeteries overseas you will not find him listed. His parents requested that his body be brought home. Jack is buried at Union Cemetery.

### **Let us Never Forget that Freedom is NOT Free**

Compiled by Jerry Hook with Research assistance from Kathy Hanna