Railsplitter Obituary

Neitzke, Norman William

February 12, 1926 - December 8, 2008

Neitzke, Norman William of Menomonee Falls, age 82 went home to the Lord Monday, December 8, 2008. Beloved husband of Lucille for 60 years. Cherished father of the late Russell (Donna), Jane (John) Lorch, Keith (Souy), Colleen (James) Cross. Proud grandpa of Jason, Eric, Christopher, Aaron, Kelly, Adrianne, Kimberly, Holly and Katie. Further survived by other relatives and friends. Norman proudly served in WWII as a member of the 101st Airborne "Band of Brothers" 506 PIR E Co. He was owner/operator of Tri-County Insurance Agency for over 40 years..

From the March 2009 *Railsplitters Bugler*:

MSG Norm Neitzke, MSG, USAR, Ret., passed away this past 9 December 2008, at the age of 82, survived by his wife Lucille, son Keith and two daughters Jane and Colleen. Norm was an Honorary Member of the 84th Division Alumni Association, as one of “our Greatest Generation Veterans from World War II”.

Norm was a Milwaukee native who did not attend his graduation from Washington High School because he was at Army Boot Camp. Norm joined the 101st Airborne Division as a replacement in 1945 and assigned to Easy Company in the 506th Airborne Regiment that became immortalized by Steven Ambrose’s book Band of

Railsplitter Obituary

Brothers and was later made into HBO series of the same title. Norm is mentioned in this book on page 261 and also appears twice in the HBO series talking about his experiences.

Norm returned to the United States to get married, raise a family and work in the insurance business eventually starting the Tri-County Insurance Agency. Norm also continued to serve in the Army Reserve and was an alumnus of the 84th Division USAR. Norm and Lucille often attended 84th Railsplitters Association events and was honored as one of our special members.

Neitzke was one of “Band of Brothers”

By Meg Jones of the Journal Sentinel

Many U.S. Army infantry companies fought the Germans in Europe, but only one is known as the band of brothers.

Norm Neitzke was one of those brothers in Easy Company of the Army's 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne immortalized in the Stephen Ambrose bestseller "Band of Brothers," which later became an HBO miniseries.

Sent as a replacement to fill out the unit that lost many men in the D-Day invasion and Battle of the Bulge, Neitzke, in a 2006 Journal Sentinel interview, vividly recalled entering a German concentration camp and his fear when hearing German artillery rounds pass over his head.

Neitzke died Monday, Deccember 8, 2008 of a heart attack at the insurance agency in Milwaukee where he worked part-time. The World War II hero from Menomonee Falls was 82.

A Milwaukee native who skipped his Washington High School graduation to go to boot camp, Neitzke joined Easy Company in February 1945. One of the more poignant scenes in the book and series is when the unit enters a concentration camp.

Railsplitter Obituary

"One of the duties was to pick up food for the concentration camp victims. We found out later we were doing the wrong thing, because they would eat themselves to death," Neitzke recalled. "We had these big wheels of cheese almost as big as a tire. So we had to take it away right after giving it to them. It kind of made you think why I went to fight. We said, 'Now we know,' after seeing the concentration camp victims."

He's mentioned on page 261 of the book in a passage where he and other soldiers decide to take a German ambulance, and he appears twice in the HBO series talking about his experiences. Neitzke's assessment of the book and series was that both were realistic, though with a few exaggerations. And he was surprised that Easy Company would end up garnering so much fame.

"We always felt there were a lot of other good units we met up with. There are about 100 infantry companies, and all of them were very good. It just so happened we were one of the units that Stephen Ambrose wrote about," Neitzke said.

Neitzke returned home to Wisconsin following the war, got married, raised a family and worked as an insurance salesman, eventually starting Tri-County Insurance Agency in Milwaukee. He and his wife, Lucille, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary Thursday.

Neitzke served in the Army Reserve for several decades and volunteered his time with numerous veterans groups.

"He was really a soldier's soldier. He really enjoyed talking to other vets," said Robert Sorrell, a retired Coast Guard chief warrant officer.

The night after their wedding anniversary, the couple attended an awards banquet in West Allis for the Milwaukee NCO Council, a local veterans group, and Neitzke spoke about his World War II experiences.

"At some point in the last couple years he really made a conscious decision to start talking and pass down that history to as many people as possible," said his son-in-law Jim Cross.

His daughter Colleen Cross remembers her summers were always centered on the 101st Airborne reunions in various states.

Railsplitter Obituary

"I knew that my summer vacation would be surrounded by veterans of the 101st, and we would always stop at the hospitality room for the 506th," said Colleen Cross, adding that Ambrose wrote "Band of Brothers" after visiting one of the reunions.

Her father was "very surprised, very honored" by the popularity of the book and series. "It was timing. They were at one of the 506th reunions and the author happened to be in the area and decided to come in and do some interviews," she said.