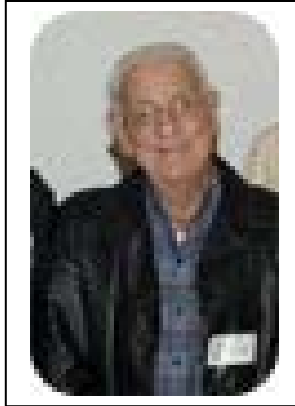


Lt Col Philip J. DiGiovanni

16 October 1920 – 17 July 2009



Lt Col Philip J. DiGiovanni passed away peacefully at age 88 on Friday, July 17, 2009, in the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Palo Alto. He was a first generation native of San Jose, CA, and attended San Jose High School and San Jose State College before entering WWII in the 184th Infantry Regiment. Phil served in the Pacific Theater and earned a Purple Heart and the Bronze Star prior to military separation in 1945. Subsequently, he served in the United States Army Reserve and completed his military service in 1981, retiring as a Lt. Colonel from the Air National Guard's 129th Medical Squadron after his transfer from the Air Guard's 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing (USAF). Phil was employed in an administrative position with Southern Pacific Railroad for 40 years.

An active member of the community, Phil was a member of Tricarico Social Club, Elks Club, 129th Rescue Wing Alumni and Heritage Association, Golden Spikes Railroad Retirement Club, Saint Christopher's Parish, and a past president and current member of the Italian-American Heritage Foundation.

Phil was preceded in death by his wife of more than 40 years, Genevieve DiGiovanni.; his sister, Marianne Hamilton; and by Winifred Davis. He is survived by his daughter, Jolie Swann; sister, Carolina Bayne of Carmel; many loving nieces and nephews; care giver, Sam Santos; many caring friends and neighbors; and many fruit trees whose bounty he enjoyed sharing with friends and family he loved.

Vigil Services were held Thursday, July 23, 2009, at LIMA CAMPAGNA ALAMEDA MISSION CHAPEL, San Jose, California. Funeral Mass was Friday, July 24, 2009, at Saint Christopher's Church, San Jose, California.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Homeless Garden Project, PO Box 617, Santa Cruz, CA, 95061 (phone 1-831-426-3609).

THE PASSING OF A PATRIOT

(July 17, 2009)

A TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL PHILIP JOSEPH DIGIOVANNI

By Roger Higby

Philip Joseph DiGiovanni was born in San Jose, California on October 16, 1920. Phil was a devoted and loving husband and father, uncle and friend. His love of gardening was second to none and he was renowned for his ability to graft fruit trees. He loved traveling (especially to New Zealand), dancing, and was extremely knowledgeable about current world events. He had an infectious smile and made friends where ever he went.

As the famous radio commentator Paul Harvey would always say; “And now for the rest of the story!” Phil was twenty-one years old when Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Like thousands of others, he joined the United States Army and went off to war. After basic training, he was assigned to Northern California’s 184th Infantry Regiment (2d California), which was attached to the 7th Infantry Division in November 1942.

ALASKA

In August 1943 the unit was designated as the 184th Regimental Combat Team and it was the first military unit to regain American soil since the War of 1812 when it invaded Kiska in the Aleutian Islands, which had been occupied by Japanese forces. The majority of the Japanese had already slipped away and there was little, if any, combat experienced during this campaign known as “Operation Cottage.” One month later the unit departed the cold countryside of Alaska and went to Schofield Barracks in Hawaii for additional training.

MARSHAL ISLANDS

In January 1944, Phil and his unit left the peace of Hawaii and, by February, had invaded the Marshal Islands, landing at heavily defended Kwajalein Atoll where it inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. The 184th

had the distinct honor of being the first National Guard unit to seize and hold Japanese territory. With the island secured, the unit re-embarked on transports and returned to Hawaii.

PHILIPPINES

In September 1944, the unit departed Hawaii once again on transports bound for Eniwetok Island; however, the operation was cancelled in favor of a larger landing and the liberation of the Philippines.

On the 20th of October, the 184th made an amphibious landing on the beaches near Dulag on the east coast of the island of Leyte. The Japanese 34th Army, consisting of four divisions, including the infamous 16th Division that was credited for the “Rape of Nanking” and the “Bataan Death March,” was the primary opponent on Leyte. The 184th experienced high casualties and Sergeant Phil DiGiovanni was credited with saving both American and Filipino fighters lives during this fight.

After several campaigns on Leyte, the 184th was finally relieved by the Americal Division on the 10th of February. The 184th had been in constant combat for almost four months. The 184th is credited with inflicting over 54,000 enemy deaths and awarded the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for its efforts in freeing the Filipino people.

Many Filipino soldiers survived thanks to the medical treatment received by Sgt. Phil DiGiovanni and as token of their appreciation they presented him with a large, hand-made Filipino knife. That knife remained with Phil throughout his life. It is ironic that in his youth Phil gave comfort and aide to Filipinos and near the end of his life, Sam Santos, a native of the Philippines, gave him loving care and aide.

OKINAWA

On April 1, 1945, the division landed on Okinawa with orders to clear the southern end of the island. During heavy artillery fire between Japanese and American forces, Phil was wounded and taken off of the front lines for medical treatment. When the Ryukyus Campaign ended a month later, the Japanese 32nd Army had lost tens of thousands of its soldiers. The 184th had lost hundreds.

The unit began planning for the invasion of the Japanese homeland but the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the need for those landings.

KOREA

The 7th Infantry Division was assigned the task of going to Korea and disarming the Japanese garrison and acting as an occupation force. Although Phil had earned enough points to return home, the mission commanders were seeking senior combat veterans to assist with the surrender of Japanese forces and Phil volunteered. Phil and his team landed at Inchon and marched all the way to Seoul. Upon arrival in Seoul, they established an aide station at the Imperial Palace and treated Americans, Koreans and Japanese with medical care.

SERVING YOUR COUNTRY

An unknown author wrote; “A veteran – whether active duty, retired, National Guard or Reserve – is someone who at one point in his life wrote a blank check made payable to the United States of America for an amount of “up to and including my life.’ That is honor. There are far too many people in this country who don’t understand it.” Phil did understand.

Phil DiGiovanni always said that “War was hell!” Like servicemen of today, Phil was keenly aware of the value in preserving freedom, even if it meant answering the call to arms. John Stuart Mill wrote over one hundred years ago; “War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.” Tom Brokaw wrote a book entitled “The Greatest Generation” paying homage to those, like Phil, who defended freedom in one of the darkest times in history. The character and fiber of our soldiers and sailors who fought and died in World War II has set the standard by which all of our young warriors of today are judged. Winston Churchill stated; “Never have so many owed so much to so few!” Churchill was referring to members of the Royal Air Force but it was an accurate description for all who fought tyranny and oppression during the war.

MILITARY AWARDS & DECORATIONS

Phil was awarded the Combat Medic Badge for rendering medical aide to wounded and dying troops during months of combat. Phil also earned the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation, and multiple campaign medals and devices.

Phil returned from the war in 1945 and received his commission as an officer and earned additional awards for his service in both the Army Reserves and the Air National Guard, including the Air Force Senior Medical Service function badge. He ended his service to his country as a Lieutenant Colonel and as the first squadron commander of the 129th Medical Squadron.

In honor of his service to his country, the 129th Rescue Wing of the California Air National Guard has flown a flag at half-staff. The flag and his awards and decorations will be placed in a shadow box and on display at the 129th Medical Squadron as a testimony to his devoted service to his country and his contributions to the 129th.

COMMON BONDS

Although I met Phil many years ago it has only been the last nine years that we really became close friends. Phil and I had so much in common it was almost like we were related. Just a few of the common bonds that we had were that his mother and my wife were from the same town in Italy. We were both first generation Americans. Although two decades apart, Phil and I both joined the Army during time of war and we both served in the Pacific theater. We both graduated from San Jose State and we both loved to eat the bounty from our own gardens. Again, at separate times, we both joined the Air National Guard's 144th in Fresno and then transferred to the 129th, where we ended our respective Air Guard careers. Phil and I both enjoyed attending Tricarico Club meetings and his last outing prior to his passing was when, just a few weeks ago, he attended the annual picnic and had an opportunity to visit with old friends. Another special day for each of us was attending the annual "Old Timers" luncheon hosted by the 129th Alumni and Heritage Association.

A long time friend, Tricarico Club member and fellow veteran, Pat Caporale stated, "I don't think I have ever heard Phil say a bad word about

anyone.” The other side of that coin is that I have never heard anyone say a bad word about Phil either. Your presence here today is a token of the love you have for Phil DiGiovanni. Truly, to know him was to love him.

CIAO – NOT GOOD BYE

It is impossible to say good bye to such a wonderful husband, father, uncle, friend and patriot so we will simply say “ciao amico mio; ci vediamo (good bye my friend; until we meet again)!” Phil was my friend; Phil is my friend; and Phil will remain my friend. My personal relationship with Phil is similar to one that Piglet and Winnie the Pooh had. Piglet asked, “Are we going to be friends forever?” “Even longer,” answered Pooh.

In concluding this eulogy I would like to plagiarize from a Marine Master Gunnery Sergeant friend who always ends his letters with this same quote: “Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you, Jesus Christ and the American G. I. One died for your soul; the other for your freedom.” May you rest in peace my dear friend; you have earned it.

Roger Higby
San Jose, California
July 24, 2009