

# Our great grandfather

## Constantine Emmanuel Hastalis

From Nicholas Byerly (RO) & Kristina Byerly (RM)

Our great grandfather was Constantine Emmanuel Hastalis, born July 31, 1919, and grew up in Jamaica Queens, New York City. He was inducted into the U.S. Army March 14, 1941. He underwent training in Kansas, New York, Kentucky and Arizona, before crossing the Atlantic Ocean by ship. Second Lieutenant Hastalis arrived in England in late May 1944, where he was assigned to a replacement depot as an excess officer. On June 15, 1944, 9 days after the June 6 D-Day invasion, he was assigned to 'A Company' of the 743<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion, that had participated in the D-Day invasion where it suffered high casualties. Army units were assigned secret code names, and 'Verify' was the code name for the 743<sup>rd</sup>.

The following are from Constantine's written memoirs –

My exposure to war began in the Hedgerow Country of France, called The Bocage, and experienced much fighting through France, Belgium, Holland and into Germany. Challenges included running out of fuel and equipment, as General Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army often received supplies before us the 743<sup>rd</sup> entered Tournai, Belgium on September 2, 1944, Maastricht, Holland on September 14<sup>th</sup>, and Germany on September 18<sup>th</sup>. I was wounded on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, breaching the Siegfried Line, where many officers and enlisted men were either killed or wounded. I re-joined my unit on November 17<sup>th</sup>, encountering adverse weather conditions and fierce German resistance through November. [In the Army's October 3<sup>rd</sup> *After Action Report* – "...One tank had a track blown by a mine. The company remained in this vicinity, fighting anti-tank guns, dug-in tanks, and at the same time supporting, by fire, the advance of the infantry. ...While working with battalion maintenance repairing the tank damaged by the mine, Lt. Hastalis was wounded in the hip by mortar fire. He was evacuated." He was awarded the Purple Heart medal for this.]



## VE day Celebrations

75years

Things quieted down as we waited at the Roer River. This break allowed for training our new recruits, augmenting the ranks of each Company. We were alerted on December 16<sup>th</sup> that the Germans had launched a counteroffensive through The Ardennes. We moved out at 2 a.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup> and headed for Malmedy, arriving at 10 a.m. We had no maps, information that some Germans were dressed as American, from captured Americans, spoke excellent English, which included slang expressions. Thus began 'The Battle of the Bulge' – frigid weather, improper clothing, snow, poor visibility, ice-covered roads, steep drops into chasms if you began to skid, no air support due to the weather. To prevent the Germans from splitting the armies on their way to Luxembourg, we engaged them in towns, i.e. Stavelot, La Glieze, St. Vith, Vielsalm and Stoumont, we held and turned the tide, and halted their drive. On December 24<sup>th</sup> the skies cleared, and the American Air Force went to work reining havoc on the fleeing Germans. Crossed the Roer River, having moved back to Aachen, Germany from there on; the crossing was affected on February 24, 1945. Crossed the Rhine River on March 14<sup>th</sup>, on April 17<sup>th</sup> took our last objective, Magdeburg, on the Elbe River. On April 18<sup>th</sup> that was it, no more fighting. On April 24<sup>th</sup> we overran a German Concentration Camp, freeing 2,500 starving Jewish inmates. V.E. Day May 8<sup>th</sup>, prayers for our fallen comrades, time to reflect, make plans to come home and to be honourably discharged at the discretion of the Army. "My enlistment of 12 months extended to 58 months, much of my youth, for a just cause 'I hope.'" [Captain Hastalis was honourably discharged from the U.S. Army January 14, 1946.] Among medals Constantine earned are the Bronze Star, Battle of the Bulge and VE (Commemorating Victory in Europe).