

Historical Threads

John P. Lamb, Veteran of the Normandy Invasion

by Jay M. Jones



Just under 1,400 names of local heroes that served in the armed services during World War II are listed on the memorial at Veterans Park in Cedar City. The 75th anniversary of the D-Day Invasion at Normandy provides an opportunity to reflect on the service and sacrifices made not all that long ago by local people that we may still be able to learn more about.

Three weeks after the Normandy D-Day invasion of World War II, the Iron County Record, the weekly newspaper for Cedar City and surrounding areas, passed along the first word received in Cedar City from a local soldier participating in the invasion.

John P. Lamb wrote home to his parents, “Again we are back in the line. It is the same old war except it’s fiercer and in a different kind of country. As you’ve heard, we of the ‘Fighting First’ made the assault not an easy one and something that we will remember for a long time.”

In the coming days, other accounts would trickle in from other soldiers that would paint a broader picture of Iron County’s part in the war.

As he indicated in his letter, John Lamb was not new to battle. Nor were other soldiers from Southern Utah.

On Monday 3 March 1941, nine months before the Pearl Harbor attack launched the United States into war, 122 officers and men of Battery "F" of the 222nd Field Artillery were mustered into active service at the National Guard armory in Cedar City. Among that number was John P. Lamb.

Two weeks later, Battery "F" was off to San Luis Obispo, California for regular military training. According to the Iron County Record, "at the end of the year they will be discharged from service unless congress takes some additional action in the meantime, as the result of emergencies that may exist."

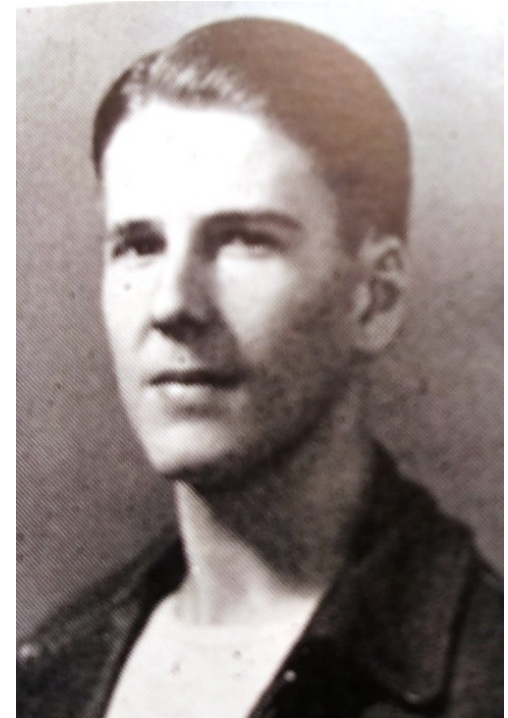
In May of 1941, the Record reported that 36 men from Battery "F" had been transferred to other units. One of them was Corporal John Lamb. Members of Battery "F" went on to serve in many different units located all over the world for the duration of the war.

In August 1942, Corporal Lamb went to officer training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Completing that, he was commissioned a second lieutenant and transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

After serving in North Africa for a time, Lieutenant Lamb participated in the invasion of Sicily in 1943.

In a letter home, dated 24 July 1943, he wrote: "We of the 1st Division landed in the Southeast sector of the Island near Gela on the morning following Sherm's birthday [a brother serving in the Army Air Corps].

"I landed a few minutes after the initial assault wave, while the beach was still being shelled and the machine guns were still chattering.



“From the time I hit the water, which was chest deep, until I was 100 yards inland, I fell down at least 20 times, due to fatigue and sitting in the same position in my boat.

“My Radio crew and I continued inland with our radio to higher ground where I could obtain good observation and from then, which was about 8:00 a. m. until 5:00 in the afternoon, I directed gunfire on opportune targets that arose.”

Lieutenant Lamb received a Silver Star medal for action in Sicily on July 27, 1943. Quoting from the Iron County Record, “According to the official report, when heavy enemy fire prevented an infantry company from advancing, Lt. Lamb left a place of comparative safety, located an excellent observation post, and proceeded to direct accurate artillery fire on enemy strongholds. He remained in this exposed position despite determined enemy resistance until the infantry had attained its objective.”

After his work in Sicily and his participation in the campaign on mainland Italy, Lieutenant Lamb was assigned to staff headquarters in England.

He stated that he liked his work, but sometimes didn’t know how to act among the high ranking brass. “It is pretty rough going at times. Guess I was set out to be a field soldier,” he wrote.

John Lamb continued to serve as a field soldier following Normandy. In 1945 he received a Bronze Star for helping to coordinate artillery fire to breach the Siegfried Line, the major defensive line defending Germany from continued Allied advance.

John Prescott Lamb married Ms. Pixie Prentice in May 1945 in England. Theirs was described as a match made in heaven, with love for horses, outdoors, travel and family. He continued in the army, retiring as a colonel in 1969. He then lived in Bothell, Washington, and died October 15, 2017 at the age of 95.

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