

# 1945 July 16-22

## An Army in the Army

### At Front 154 Consecutive Days Is La Crosse Soldier's Record

Three days after the Germans began their December counter-offensive in Belgium, Pfc. Louis Gueltzow transferred to the 1st Army with the 87th Division to fight until he was the only man left in his squad and one of eight remaining in the platoon.

During the Battle of the Bulge, the 87th Division made a push of 11 miles, the largest single advance made by any unit during this encounter. Before its transfer to the 1st Army, the division had been fighting with the 9th Army in the Saar valley and was due to be relieved.

Gueltzow joined the 87th Division at Fort Jackson, S. C., after his induction, March 10, 1943. The unit went overseas in October, 1944, and with the 345th Infantry Regiment he saw nine months of overseas duty, including action with the 7th, 9th, 1st and 3rd Armies in France, Belgium, Germany and Czechoslovakia.

#### On Line 154 Days

On Dec. 7, 1944, the 345th was sent into combat near Metz, France. It was the first regiment of the division to go into the line and at one time Gueltzow was on the line for 154 consecutive days.

A three-day break in combat duty came for him as a result of chest and arm injuries received



—Tribune Photo

PFC. LOUIS GUELZOW

April 10. As a jeep driver in a heavy weapons company, he was scouting for road blocks in the path of the 3rd army when a German tank spotted him and fired. Fragments from a shell which exploded against a tree killed the man riding with him and injured Gueltzow.

The end of the war in Europe was followed by assignment to the army of occupation in Wurzbach, Germany, for this combat infantryman. Here he helped with the distribution and control of supplies and the stabilization of the shifting German peoples anxious to return to their homes from their places of refuge. He continued in this work until his return to the States July 11.

#### Reports Aug. 21

Besides his 59 points, Gueltzow has earned the combat infantry medal, purple heart, good conduct ribbon and the ETO ribbon with battle stars for Metz, Ardennes forest, Rhineland and central Germany. After his 37-day furlough he will report Aug. 21 at Camp McCoy and then travel to Fort Benning, Ga.

He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Gueltzow, 108 North Ninth street. His brother, Sgt. John Gueltzow, is with the 33rd Infantry Division in the South Pacific. Both men are graduates of Central high school.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 July 22, page 12)

In June and July 1945, there were many newspaper articles about La Crosse County men and women being brought back to the United States for reassignment or being discharged to civilian life. There are undoubtedly more to come the rest of the year.

The article above, concerning Private First Class Louis Gueltzow of La Crosse, is typical. Gueltzow was a member of the [345th Infantry Regiment](#) of [the 87th Infantry Division](#). At various times, the [345th Infantry Regiment](#), as part of the 87th Infantry Division, was part of the 7th, 9th, 1st, and 3rd Armies in the [European Theater](#). The concept of Armies in the Army may be confusing, so what does all of this mean?

The key to understanding the nomenclature, and also appreciating the scope of World War II, is decoding the hierarchical structure of the United States armed forces, in this case the United States Army.

Since United States Army infantry divisions were the most numerous units in World War II, this analysis will use them as an example.

Squad = 8-12 men: commanded by a Corporal or a Sergeant  
 Platoon = 3-4 squads: commanded by a 2nd Lieutenant (48-50 men)  
 Company = 3-4 platoons: commanded by a 1st Lieutenant or Captain (150-200 men)  
 Battalion = 3-4 companies: commanded by a Major (800 men)  
 Regiment = 3 battalions: commanded by a Lt. Colonel (2,400 men)  
 Division = 3 regiments: commanded by a Lt. [3-star] or Major [2-star] General (10,000 - 15,000 men)  
 Corps = 2 or more divisions: commanded by a Lt. General (2 divisions = 30,000+ men)  
 Army = 2 or more corps: commanded by a General [4-star] (2 corps = 60,000+ men)  
 Army Group = 2 or more armies<sup>1</sup> (2 armies = 120,000+ men)

The strength of units varied because of combat losses, furloughs and leaves, men on detached duty, and other factors. Numerical strength increases going up the organizational chart not just because of more core units, but also because of added support and specialized auxiliary units.

Squads and platoons were called 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th. Companies were designated with letters: A, B, C, D, E, etc. Battalions were numbered 1st, 2nd, 3rd. Regiments had numbers too, but each was unique, such as Gueltzow's 345th Regiment, with its own unique insignia. Divisions were also numbered, and they had their unique number, insignia, and moniker.<sup>2</sup> Besides its organizational utility, this is one of the ways the military instills unit pride in its soldiers.

Louis Gueltzow was a member of the 87th Infantry "Golden Acorn" Division. It was just one of [68 Army infantry divisions](#) in World War II. There were also 16 armored divisions, five airborne divisions, two cavalry divisions, and one mountain division.<sup>3</sup>



87th Infantry Division patch  
(USAMM.com)

The United States Army was a triangular organization at the battalion and regiment level, meaning three battalions generally constituted a regiment, and three regiments comprised a division. The idea was that two battalions or regiments would be on the front line while one battalion or regiment was behind the line in reserve to plug breakthroughs in their parent unit's line or exploit breakthroughs of the enemy's line.

A typical World War II United States Army infantry division consisted of three infantry regiments, each with three infantry battalions. In addition to three infantry battalions, each regiment had an attached anti-tank company and an artillery company. Each division also had a reconnaissance troop, three light artillery battalions, a medium artillery battalion, an engineer company, and a signals (communications) company. The total strength of an infantry division was 14,253 officers and men.<sup>4</sup>

Assignment of divisions to corps and to armies was sometimes fluid depending on the needs of a particular battlefield. A division could be transferred from army to army, depending on the mission requirements at the time.

Here was the United States Army roster for World War II.



1st Army patch  
(MilitaryItems.com)

First Army: Arrived in England in October 1943, participated in the invasion of Normandy and fought across northwest Europe until the end of the war.



2nd Army patch  
(Medals of America)

Second Army: Never went overseas.



3rd Army patch  
(Military Uniform Supply)

Third Army: Landed in France in July 1944 and fought through northwest Europe.



4th Army patch  
(Military Uniform Supply)

Fourth Army: Never went overseas.



5th Army patch  
(Medals of America)

Fifth Army: Activated in North Africa in January 1943. Conducted operations in Italy.



6th Army patch  
(Medals of America)

Sixth Army: Arrived in the Pacific Theater in January 1943 and remained there until the end of the war.



7th Army patch<sup>5</sup>  
(Medals of America)

Seventh Army: Activated in July 1943 for the invasion of Sicily. Invaded southern France in August 1944 and fought in France and Germany until the end of the war.



8th Army patch  
(Military Uniform Supply)

Eighth Army: Activated in June 1944 and fought in the Pacific Theater until the end of the war.



9th Army patch  
(Dover Army-Navy Store)

Ninth Army: Arrived in England in June 1944. Operational in France in September 1944 and fought there and in Germany until the end of the war.



10th Army patch  
(mydogtag.com)

Tenth Army: Fought on Okinawa April through July 1945.



15th Army patch  
(Priorservice.com)

Fifteenth Army: Activated in January 1945 in northwest Europe as a mopping up and garrison force. Contained six divisions at most.<sup>6</sup>

Northwest Europe in 1944-1945 saw the largest concentration of ground forces in the war. The Sixth Army Group, consisting of the 7th U.S. Army and the First French Army under General Jacob Devers, fought in southern France. The Twelfth Army Group, under General Omar Bradley, consisting of the 1st U.S. Army, 3rd U.S. Army, 9th U.S. Army, and the 15th U.S. Army, fought through central France and into Germany. On the northern end of the Allied advance was British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery commanding the Twenty-first Army Group with the Second Army (British) and First Canadian Army.<sup>7</sup>

This was just the U.S. Army ground forces. There was also the Army Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard in the armed forces during World War II.

Viewed from the bottom up, one could consider Private First Class Louis Gueltzow and millions of men like him as just very small cogs in [a huge machine](#). But the operation of the huge machine depends on each of those small cogs doing their job. That is what this project is all about---highlighting the individual contributions of heroes next door who did their part to help save the world 75 years ago.

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#### Sources & Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Mack Dean, "WW2 Army Unit and Size Composition Table," *worldwar2facts.org*, 2020 May 9, <http://www.worldwar2facts.org/ww2-army-units-and-sizes.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The sole exception was the Americal Division.

<sup>3</sup> "Combat Chronicles of U.S. Army Divisions of World War II," *U.S. Army Center of Military History*, accessed 2020 July 26, <https://history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/cbtchron/cbtchron.html>.

<sup>4</sup> John Ellis, *World War II: A Statistical Survey, The Essential Facts and Figures for All the Combatants* (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 220.

<sup>5</sup> A World War II 7th Army veteran told the author that the soldiers in the 7th Army referred to their patch as "The Seven Steps to Hell."

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Ellis, 90.