



Ambrose Jackson Rasnake

Ambrose Jackson Rasnake, Service #15057397, Technician 5th Grade, Headquarters Battery, 395th Armed Field Artillery Battalion. Ambrose was born in Coulwood, Russell Co., Va., on 2 Feb 1919, a son of Roby Kernan Rasnake and Zona Estella White. He enlisted in the Army 4 Oct 1940 at Fort Thomas, Ky., at the age of 21 and listed his occupation as laborer. On his enlistment record, he was described as having blue eyes, brown hair, ruddy complexion, 5 feet, 7 inches tall. He was honorably discharged on 4 May 1944 at O'Reilly General Hospital, Springfield, Missouri. Ambrose's records cite his military qualifications as 45 caliber machine gun expert, skilled radio operator, and cannoneer. His decorations include the European African Middle Eastern Theater Campaign Ribbon with One Battle Star; a Lapel Button; a Good Conduct Medal; and a Purple Heart for the wounds he received in the North Africa campaign at El Guettar. The remainder of this story is taken from a newspaper article by Jimmy Smyth published in May 1944 in the Bluefield [Va.] Daily Telegraph. "PFC Ambrose Rasnake of Bluefield, Virginia, who spent over five months in actual combat in North Africa, and who was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in that campaign, and at one time also spent four days behind the German lines, came back home to see his folks Wednesday. It was all that simple the way young Rasnake told the story but it wasn't that simple and his eyes spoke the truth as I talked to him. After taking part in the initial invasion of Africa, and fighting doggedly with other Yanks for months against often time numerically superior Germans, PFC Rasnake was wounded by a German 10 inch mortar shell on March 28 of this year, only a short time before his comrades in arms put the finishing touches on the cleanup of Nazis in North Africa. It was in the battle of El Guettar that the shell struck, killing two of Rasnake's best pals, the platoon sergeant and the radio operator, and leaving young Rasnake unconscious for fourteen hours. On regaining consciousness he discovered he was partially paralyzed by the explosion of the shell. After a month of medical care in North Africa station hospitals, PFC Rasnake was returned to the states 2 May 1943. He was graduated from Graham High School in 1940 and was a star athlete during his four years at the school. Son of R.K. Rasnake of Honaker, Virginia, young Rasnake had resided with Mr. and Mrs. V. C. Wysor, 906 Greever Avenue, Bluefield, Virginia for several years. Upon completion of his high school studies, he decided that he would join the Army and that he did in September 1940. He

wears a service bar today for his year's service before Pearl Harbor. On May 29, 1942, Rasnake went overseas with a host of other Yanks, bound for England. Asked if they ran into any trouble on the way over, he said three subs were sighted off the coast of Greenland, but depth charges brought them to the surface and shells did the rest, with no loss of Yank ships or men. After five months of training in England the Yanks left for this destination, the invasion of North Africa – and PFC Rasnake was right there. However, before leaving England, Rasnake just had to put in some good words for the English. He had nothing but praise for the fine spirit of an England at war, and their hospitality, he said, was superb. Gasoline in England? Yes, but scarcely little for civilians, Rasnake explained because England knew there was a war on and didn't take anything the military might need to win it. What did the English think of the Yanks? Many had so much confidence they thought the war would be over within six months after the Yanks landed, Rasnake said. PFC Rasnake had nothing but praise for the fighting prowess of the Germans. Speaking of them he said, they didn't give an inch, they didn't have to, and they were smart, too. One day we had drawn our defense lines in an olive orchard. There were a few olive trees on the opposite hill. Each morning, though they seemed to change position, new ones cropping up here and there. Later after the Germans started firing, we knew what had been happening. They had drawn closer shielded by the olive trees and had drawn their guns up with them. Well we leveled that whole hillside with machine gun fire and that was the last of their sneak play. The Italians, though had no heart for fighting, young Rasnake said. One Italian prisoner asked him how the Dodgers were doing. He went ahead to explain that he was educated in America, but upon going back to Italy, Mussolini put him in the Italian Army and made him fight. The closest shave he had before being wounded, Rasnake said, was on morning when he and the other Yanks were awakened by the machine gun fire in the Kassarine Pass. The Germans had sneaked up on them and machine gun fire passed right through the pup tent in which he was sleeping. The Germans were so close the Yanks could hear the German officers shouting orders. Rasnake said, and after the Yanks had rallied from the surprise attack and started up a furious fusillade of fire at the Nazis at the top of the hill, a Nazi officer barked an order (at least it sounded like an order to the Yanks) and the Germans retreated. PFC Rasnake, after lying in Army hospitals for the past five and one-half months, said he was anxious to get a new assignment in the Army and this he will do when he report to Camp Cheffey, Arkansas, the latter part of this month. P.S.: To conclude the interview, young Rasnake brought up his strongest feeling in the war this far: "When the nurse told me I was going back to the States, it hurt like everything to realized that I was leaving a group of fellows in North Africa (now probably in Italy) with whom I had trained and fought for three years. PFC Rasnake has another brother Warner Samuel, who joined the United States Navy last month." -A Tribute to World War II Veterans of Russell County Virginia. Historical Society of Russell Co., Va., 1999. Ambrose Jackson was a son of Roby Kernan Rasnake and Zona Estella White. Roby was son of Robert Lilburn Rasnake and Mary Ann Musick. Robert Lilburn was son of William Jacob Rasnake and Leah Stephens. William Jacob Rasnake was son of George Rasnake and Nancy Wallis. George was son of Jacob Rasnake, Jr., and Judith Finney. Jacob, Jr., was son of Revolutionary War soldier, Jacob Ruehrschneck.