

# **1 LT Carey E. Ashcraft 1922 to 2014**

## **EARLY YEARS**

Carey E. Ashcraft was a native of the state of Mississippi. He was born on January 12, 1922, in Meridian, a small city south of his family home near New Hope, Lowndes County, Mississippi. His parents were farmers. Carey graduated from New Hope High School and then attended Mississippi State University in Starkville, graduating in 1943 with a degree in Agriculture. On February 2, 1943, Carey enlisted in the United States Army at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, near Hattiesburg.

## **MILITARY AND POW EXPERIENCES**



Carey was assigned to the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, an all-draftee division, nicknamed the Blue Devils. The 88<sup>th</sup> arrived in Casablanca, French Morocco, on December 15, 1943, for intensive combat training in Magenta, Algeria. The division was sent to Naples, Italy, arriving February 6, 1944, for further combat training. The 88<sup>th</sup> was the first all draftee division to enter a combat area. On March 5, the division finally saw action, relieving British units in the Minturno

area, north of Naples.

On May 11, 1944, as part of the Fifth Army, the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division drove north toward Rome, which was captured on June 4. A unit of the 88<sup>th</sup> was credited with being the first to enter the city. After some rest and recuperation and additional training, the 88<sup>th</sup> returned to the front July 5 and 6, 1944 and continued northward, crossing the Arno River on July 20. The division had another period of rest and training, returning to combat on September 21, 1944. The objective this time was to break the Gothic Line across northern Italy. Carey Ashcraft's war ended on September 24, 1944, when he was captured near Imola, Italy, south east of Bologna. His rank at that time was First Lieutenant. His combat action in Italy eventually resulted in the award of both the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

1LT Ashcraft did not arrive at Oflag 64 until January 1, 1945. The more than three months between capture and arrival presumably involved shuttling from camp to camp, possibly some time in hospital, and the usual interrogations. On January 21, 1945, he marched out of Oflag 64 on the long march to Parchim, Germany, then to Hammelburg and Oflag XIII B by rail, arriving March 8, 1945. When Oflag XIII B was evacuated on April 1, Carey was in a rail group, rather than a marching group. His train reached Nurnberg the afternoon of April 2, where the prisoners were unloaded and

marched from the railyard to the autobahn, where they took cover as Nurnberg was bombed. After a night spent in the Nazi Party Stadium, the prisoners were loaded back on a train and the journey south, through Munich to Moosburg, continued. Carey's final days of the war were spent at Stalag VII A outside Moosburg.

## **GOING HOME**

Stalag VII A was liberated on April 29, 1945. By June 6 1LT Ashcraft was back at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and was given a 60-day furlough. And on June 8, 1945, he married Delva Leverne Blackwell. He was released from active service on February 2, 1946, having served for three years. Unlike most veterans, Carey remained in the Army Reserves and served in the National Guard for 25 years, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.



## **LATER YEARS**

After World War 2 Carey Ashcraft worked for the Mississippi Department of Employment Security for 40 years. He and Delva raised four daughters in various Mississippi towns. By the early 1970's they were living in Clinton, Mississippi, which became their permanent home. Carey retired in 1986, having risen to the position of Chief Administrative Law Judge. He was active in his church, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Mississippi Department of American Ex-Prisoners of War, Inc. He also wrote a memoir of his war experience, Country Boy Infantry: "the Blue Devils" 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division 1944-1945, printed by Keahey Graphics on January 1, 1997.

Carey E. Ashcraft died on May 2, 2014 in Jackson, Mississippi, at the Veterans Affairs Nursing Home.

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