

POW / MIA PROFILES

The purpose of the State POW/MIA Committee is to “provide increased awareness of POW / MIAs, to organize the Department and Posts’ POW / MIA activities and to provide education to the public”. To realize this duty, a profile of a WI resident who is or has been classified as POW / MIA will be presented each month for your reflection. It is with great respect that we present this month’s Profile.

On November 25 1940, A Company of the 192nd Tank Battalion, Wisconsin National Guard received orders to Federal Service. One of A Company’s troopers was 23-year-old Donald Heddleston. Donald grew up in Orfordville, WI and had just joined the unit in October 1940.

The 192nd trained at Fort Knox, KY from Jan 1941 to late summer where they then participated in maneuvers at Camp Polk, LA. After these maneuvers, the Battalion was transferred overseas instead of being released from Federal Service. The Philippine Islands was their final destination and TEC 5 Heddleston became part of HQ Company.

On the morning of December 8, 1941 TEC 5 Heddleston and HQ Company learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. At 12:15 that afternoon, Japanese planes attacked their location. For the next four months, Donald and HQ Company kept the tanks of the 192nd operational. On April 9, 1942 Captain Bruni told HQ Company of the surrender of the Philippines. After two days, Japanese soldiers appeared and Donald Heddleston became a Prisoner of War along with the rest of HQ Company.

They were ordered to move out and they embarked on what became known as the Baatan Death March. According to other members of the Company, Donald had a leg wound and had a very hard time on the march. The POW’s arrived at Camp O’Donnell whereupon Donald was hospitalized due to his wound. It was while in the hospital that he became ill with dysentery.

According to a final report written by 1st Lt. Jacques Merrifield, T/5 Donald M. Heddleston died from dysentery on June 8, 1942 at Camp O'Donnell. After the war, his remains were buried at the American Military Cemetery at Manila.

The POW/ MIA Committee wishes to thank Bobbe Stuvengen, Past State Historian, for bringing this story to us.