

The 99th Infantry Battalion of WWII

While sitting at the Sons of Norway having lunch, I wondered how many Norwegian Americans served in various wars. After some searching, I found information on the 99th Infantry Battalion. This Battalion was activated at Camp Ripley, MN on August 15, 1942 authorized by the War Department. The Battalion was to consist only of Norwegians and Americans with direct Norwegian descent. In order to be selected for the Battalion, you have to have a good working knowledge of the Norwegian language and already know how to ski. According to the Battalion website, battalion was to have 1,000 men. One of those was a dentist, who the War Department said did not belong on the organization table. Two Minnesota Senators and a Congressman convinced the War Department that a dentist was necessary, so Captain Gustav Svendsen was added. In May, 1942 the War Department called for the organization of a Battalion of Norwegian Nations to serve as part of the US Army. The primary purpose of the Battalion was to be ready for an invasion of Norway.

Besides US citizens, many of whom were first or second generation Americans, several Norwegian seamen who were stranded on Norwegian ships around the world also joined the Battalion. The soldiers completed specialized mountain training with the 10th Mountain Division at Camp Hale, CO.

During the war, the Battalion was attached to other units as needed. Near the end of the war, the 99th contributed personnel to an airborne commando mission into Northern Trondelag. A few non-Norwegian soldiers did join the Battalion and some were given Norwegian names to better fit in with the rest of the soldiers. The Battalion saw combat action in France, Belgium and Germany before being sent to Norway in June 1945 to disarm the German occupational force. On 7 June when King Haakon VII returned to Norway after five years in exile, the 99th was given the duty of Honor Guards escorting the King back to the Royal Castle. The Battalion returned to the US in October 1945.

I did a quick search on the Library of Congress Veterans History Project and found some Minnesotans who served in the 99th Infantry Battalion. They were Eugene Leo Bauer, Alf Berg who was born in Norway, Orville Carlson Flaaton, Donald Charles Johnson and Percy Pray. When I have time, I plan on listening to the interviews and perhaps doing another story. I