

Raymond Groeger

World War II
Raymond Groeger
45th Infantry Division
"The Thunderbirds"
157th Regiment
158th Field Artillery Battalion

Raymond Groeger

Raymond Groeger (right)
 Unknown Soldier (Left)
 Munich Germany VE Day, May 8, 1945

V-Mail-June 20, 1943

Letter and photos compliments of Emily Groeger

Raymond Groeger

Raymond Groeger was Born October 25, 1917. When the war began he was attending college in Greeley, Colorado at UNC. Rather than face the possibility of being drafted, Raymond decided to enlist after one year of college. He enlisted on January 22, 1941. Assigned to the 45th Division, he was sent to train at Camp Pickett, Virginia.

Raymond met his future wife Emily shortly before being sent on deployment when she was visiting Washington D.C. with a friend. Emily has described it as being love at first sight.

The V-Mail shown to the left was the first letter of correspondence that he sent to Emily after they met. It was sent June 20, 1943. Raymond was sailing to North Africa on the 45th Infantry's first deployment since World War I. The letter is one in which young love has blossomed and a young Raymond is feeling a sense of adventure for things to come. This was the beginning of an amazing journey both for him as a soldier and the two of them as a couple.

The "Thunderbird" division was deployed in late June of 1943 to North Africa. The following month, the division landed in Sicily, where it engaged Axis troops in combat. After advancing up the Italian peninsula, the 45th landed at Anzio in February of 1944, where it without repeated German assaults against its positions. Cutting across the country, the unit was sent to southern France in August of 1944. It quickly advanced through western France, reaching the German border by the end of the year. In March of 1945, the "Thunderbird" division crossed the Rhine River and headed southward. On April 20th, it captured the city of Nuremberg and on April 30th, Munich. (Information provided by the United States Holocaust Museum)

On April 29, 1945 the 157th Infantry, of which Raymond was assigned, was the first to encounter the Nazi Jewish concentration camp of Dachau and were the first to witness the horrors and atrocities that had occurred there. Raymond's Division then made its way into the heart of Nazi Germany, all the way to Hitler's Eagle's Nest.

During the war the 45th fought 511 days of combat. Raymond was awarded the Purple Heart for an injury in which he received shrapnel in his shoulder.

Raymond and Emily continued their letter writing throughout the war and afterwards they married. After the war Raymond went back to college to finish his education and enjoyed a wonderfully prosperous life. They settled in Woodland Park in 1976, had 14 children and 31 grandchildren. He became a family doctor in the area. He passed away on December 7, 1990, and is buried at the Woodland Park Cemetery.

His wife Emily still lives in Woodland Park and enjoys spending time with her family and sharing her scrapbook memories of the life she had with husband with her grandchildren so that they will always remember their adventures.

View of the Dachau concentration camp, after liberation, Germany, April 29, 1945.
 - US Holocaust Memorial Museum

As the 45th Infantry Division completed its drive on Munich, the unit was ordered to liberate the Dachau concentration camp. On April 29, 1945, three US Army divisions converged on the camp: the 42nd Infantry, the 45th Infantry, and the 20th Armored. When the three units arrived at Dachau, they discovered more than 30,000 prisoners in the overcrowded camp. Just days before, about 2,000 inmates evacuated on a death march from the Flossenbürg concentration camp had arrived at Dachau and the SS guards had forced almost 7,000 Dachau inmates to move southward. On April 28, the day before liberation, a train bearing about 40 or so railway cars arrived at the camp. It had left Buchenwald four weeks earlier on April 7th filled with more than 3,000 prisoners. With few provisions, almost 2,000 inmates died during the circuitous route that took them from Thuringia through Saxony to Czechoslovakia and into Bavaria. Their bodies were left behind in various locations throughout Germany. When US troops arrived in Dachau on April 29, they found 2,310 additional corpses on the train. The 45th surviving prisoners were taken to barracks within the camp.

The 45th Infantry and the liberation of Dachau Concentration Camp

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Emily Groeger is pictured in front of the Letters Home Exhibit at the Woodland Park Public Library with Rampart Library District director Michelle Petrazzoulo. November 10, 2018