

“American Legion Post 110, Virginia Beach, VA renamed after World War II Hero”

Written by Bert Wendell, Jr. and Mea Melberg-Rosner

Photographs courtesy of the Melberg Family and Bert Wendell, Jr.

Members of the American Legion Post 110 of Virginia Beach, VA unanimously voted to rename its post “The SSgt Robert C. Melberg, USA, American Legion Post 110, Virginia Beach, VA”. The American Legion National Headquarters approved the change on December 13, 2016.

SSgt Robert C. Melberg, USA, served his country with honor and valor during World War II; his family with devotion and love; the American Legion and Post 110 with total support “For God and Country”. Melberg was a patriot that loved his country and his fellow veterans. Bob, as his family and friends called him, passed on to “Post Everlasting” at the age of 93.

Robert Carl Melberg was born October 18, 1924 in Denver, CO to Carl and Susana Melberg. The family later moved to Ponca City, OK where he experienced firsthand the “Great Depression” and the famous “Oklahoma Dust Bowl”. He graduated from Ponca City, OK High School in 1942, entered Oklahoma A&M (now State) University in Stillwater, OK and volunteered for the Army’s Enlisted Reserve Corp. Six months later, he was called up, went to basic training at Camp Roberts, CA, qualified as a “Combat Infantryman”, and was sent to the World War II European Theatre of Operations.

It has been over 71 years since World War II’s Battle of the Bulge in The Ardennes Forest of Belgium, France, and Luxembourg. During 16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945, 610,000 American troops were involved during the Germans last offensive campaign in the European Theatre.

One of those American soldiers of the U.S. Army’s 84th Infantry Division (Railsplitters), 335th Infantry, Company B was a 21 year old Oklahoman named SSgt Robert Carl Melberg. He and his squad fought their way through Central Europe (Battle of the Bulge) into Germany. The Germans were pushed across the Roer, Rhine, and Weser Rivers. On 2 May 1945 his division linked up with the Russians near the Elbe River in Germany. The Germans surrendered on May 8, 1945 and the allies celebrated their “Victory in Europe (VE-Day)”.

SSgt Melberg and the 84th Infantry Division remained on occupation duty in Germany after VE-Day, returning to the United States on 19 January 1946 for demobilization. He was discharged on 29 January 1946 at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

For his bravery during combat actions, SSgt Melberg was awarded the Bronze Star with a Combat V (Valor) and an Oak Leaf Cluster (second award). He also received a Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman Badge, Army Good Conduct Medal, WW II European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with 3 Bronze Service Stars, American Campaign Medal, and the WW II Victory Medal.

After returning home to Ponca City, Oklahoma, Robert C. Melberg, enrolled at Purdue University and graduated in 1949 with a degree in Chemical Engineering. On December 29, 1962, in Claysburg, PA, Robert (age 38) married Martha Ann Wees (age 24). They lived in New York City, NY and had two children: Carl Ross Melberg (1964) and Martha Elizabeth Ann (Mea) Melberg (1967).

In 1971, he completed his studies at The University of Chicago and earned a MBA Degree in the Executive MBA Program. Over the years he was an incredibly loyal donor, supporting the University of Chicago with a monetary gift every year.

Melberg worked 25 years with the Continental Can Company, INC., Corrugated Container Division in New York City, NY. At Continental Can, he was instrumental in developing and marketing the “pull tab” to open the top of beverage cans. The Melberg’s moved to Williamsburg, VA in 1971. He completed his loyal service to Continental Can on December 4, 1974. In 1976, he and Martha divorced. She is currently living in Lake Placid, NY.

Too young to totally retire, he continued his career with the Planters LifeSavers Company in Suffolk, VA and retired from there on September 7, 1990 at age 65.

Melberg later moved to Virginia Beach, VA where he enjoyed the warmer weather of the Virginia Tidewater area. He traveled and often visited his children and grand-children in Nashville, TN and Carthage, NY.

Not one to talk opening about his combat action during World War II, however, he relayed a great story one evening to his fellow members of American Legion Post 110. In his words, it went this way:

“Here we were in the flatlands of the Rhine Palatinate, leaving behind the frozen snows of The Bulge, walking again. Of course, the Infantry is supposed to walk, but when they are part of an attacking Task Force, sometimes you can get a ride on a tank. Our Task Force was designed to blast through small villages and rollover pockets of resistance; the mop-up being the job of the Infantry. In the Palatinate the mop-up often required village house-to-house, door-to-door flushing out the enemy. So, that’s what we were going to do when my squad (all 8 men since The Bulge, we never had the full complement) approached a house with a shed. I

sent a couple of men to check the shed on the right, and the rest to check the inside of the house. I'd go around to the left and if all was clear we'd meet on the other side and continue on our mission. But halfway around on my side a German soldier popped up! Here is the situation: the standard weapon issued to an infantryman is the M-1 rifle. It is not the Army Colt 45 side arm, but I happened to have one (very handy for in-house mop-up). I loaned mine to the guys going in-house hunting. Now it should be noted that as a kid growing up in depression-Oklahoma when we got to see a movie it was on a Saturday and always a shoot-'em-up Western. So when the German soldier popped-up my M-1 was unhandily in my left hand. Instinctively, I whipped up my right hand and pointed my finger at the German and yelled "Hands UP". He complied. Quick-Draw McGraw had no edge on me. I captured my first and only German Prisoner."

Bob was quick witted; everyone he met was a friend; and always wore his American Legion hat, blue blazer, white turtle neck sweater and a pair of dark sunglasses to American Legion functions and the Veterans Day Parade. He served as Post 110's 2nd Vice Commander for several years.

Always the soldier, he fought a long battle with cancer, and passed away on August 4, 2016. After his cremation, he was returned home to Ponca City, OK and laid to rest near his parents at the Episcopalian Church. "Rest in Peace Friend and Legionnaire".

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