



THE AMERICAN LEGION

"The Friendly Word" from "The Friendly Post"

1655 Simms Street

Post 178

Lakewood, CO



First Sgt. Harold Nelson Awarded Silver Star

By Dave Dupree

Sergeant Harold Nelson's luck had finally run out, or so it seemed. He had survived artillery bombardments, grenade explosions, German tank fire, and exploding land mines. But this time it looked hopeless.

Harold was drafted into the U.S. Army on July 14, 1941. He was the first person in Nebraska drafted into the military and, at age 26, was among the oldest of his fellow draftees.

"I wanted to join the Air Force, but they said I was a year too old," recounted Harold. "The Army said since I walked behind a plow and walked to school and back, I was best suited for the Infantry."

After training at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas he boarded a ship on October 24, 1942 bound for combat in West Africa. Describing the experience Harold said, "We had no idea where we were going until we were out in the middle of the ocean. Just getting off the ship in Moroco was a harrowing ordeal."

"Imagine trying to go down the rope cargo net and getting into a boat with waves 10 to 20 feet high. You would try to jump into the boat quickly but maybe the boat went down 10 or 15 feet and back up again, slamming against you and the ship. Some had their legs broken. I made it okay with one big leap. I really don't know how I landed. I guess I was so scared that I can't remember."

The beach they were heading to wasn't the sandy landing they'd trained for. It was nothing but jagged coral rocks. "A lot of the men didn't make it to shore and

most of the Higgins boats were wrecked," he recalled. "I waded, fell, floated, and crawled my way to shore."

After three days of bombardment by enemy ships, American troops captured Casablanca. "We had lost a great number of men by the third day. However, that was about the last of the fighting in French Morocco."

In Africa, the vehicle he was riding in overturned when a roadside gave way. Harold hit his head and his

right leg was paralyzed, and he found himself at a field hospital. After a brief recovery he rejoined his men bound for Sicily and another amphibious landing.

They were met with minimal resistance at first, but that all changed on day three. Anzio and Nettuno, Italy became some of the most devastating days for U.S. forces in the entire war. "We were spread out too far with too few men and our casualties were many," he said. "I think I had about seven men left of about 40 that were not killed or wounded and all

of the 3rd Division was about the same." Over 950 of his fellow soldiers had perished.

During the battle he took a bullet wound to his right arm. Two of the four men in his foxhole, including his commanding officer, were killed by exploding artillery shells that also caused permanent loss of hearing in his right ear.

But now the young Nebraska farm boy had fought his way into an incomprehensibly desperate situation. He and his men had run out of ammunition and were pinned down by machine gun fire coming from an abandoned house nearby.

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1st Sgt. Harold Nelson, age 107, salutes back to Maj. Gen. Charles Costanza, Commanding General of the 3rd Infantry Division, who presented him with the Silver Star in a ceremony at Fort Carson on Tuesday, Oct. 4, 2022.

—Photo by Jerilee Bennett, The Gazette

LEGION CHAPLAIN
Russ Scott

Oh Lord, thank you for freedom we enjoy and your blessings upon this land. Grant mercy and grace to all, and may we live in peace. Guard and protect our active duty personnel wherever they serve. Be with the veterans who have served and grant them the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

COMMANDER'S REPORT
Wes Vanderpool

Commander Wes Vanderpool is traveling and is unable to submit a report this month. We all wish him a safe journey.

AUXILIARY REPORT
Kay Scott

Wednesday Dinner Nights for November 2nd, 9th, and 16th will be burgers, fish, shrimp, fries, and onion rings. We will not serve dinner November 23rd, the night before Thanksgiving. Thanks to **Dee Yurko** for lining up the cooks and servers! There will not be a dinner night on November 23rd the evening before Thanksgiving.

The **Bizarre** during Bingo will continue through the first week of November. A 50/50 raffle is conducted every Thursday and Saturday, and so far the winners have each received over \$100! Legion, patriotic, and Bronco T-shirts along with snack treats to enjoy during Bingo are also available at the Bizarre. Two beautiful quilts are being raffled and the winners will be announced during the Veterans Day Dinner. The quilts are on display at the Legion, and tickets are available until the drawing. All proceeds go to helping Vets and Military Families.

The Auxiliary will prepare and serve our traditional **Spaghetti Dinner on Veterans Day**, Friday November 11th from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m. Veterans and active military who are members of Post 178 eat FREE and all others will be \$9 dollars.

Our **"Keep the Kids Warm"** project continues until December 10th with knit and crocheted items, sewn hats, blankets, and scarves all handmade or purchased. Please place your contributions in the tub at the coupon cutting corner in the Game Room by the Bread Store. Thank you for helping us.

RIDERS REPORT
Rodney Jones

October has ended and we hope you all had a great month. The month of November is getting kicked off with a great start. Don't forget to bring in unwrapped new toys for our toy drive and run by the 10th of November. The box is in the lounge by the east pickle machines.

On Friday, November 4th **Steve and the Cruisers** band will be performing from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. We will serve our taco and burrito buffet that evening. Steak night will move to the 18th of the month. Please join us in a wonderful time and great food.

Due to increased food costs, we have to raise our prices. We continue to make every effort to serve everyone the best possible meals at the best price because we want to continue helping our Vets!

On November 5th we will ride in the **Veterans Day Parade** in downtown Denver. Come along and join us to honor those who have fought for the freedom we all cherish.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving! We love all your support and assistance! Thank you all.



**Riders Toy Drive Ends
November 10**

Bring unwrapped toys to the Post and put them in the collection box in the lounge. Donations go to Ranya Kelly's RCI for her annual Christmas Party.

**Post Pantry Volunteers
Deserve Thanks**

A host of volunteers work to keep the Post's Bread Store stocked with delicious goodies. Please thank them and don't forget to put a donation in the box when you shop at our store.



BUSINESS REPORT*Bob Heer*

Bob Heer is at home recovering from recent surgery and unable to submit a report this month. We all wish him a speedy “get well” and please hurry back to the Post because we need you.

SAL REPORT*Brad Hall*

Not much going on in October. Hopefully **Bob Heer** is feeling better soon and able to return to his ever-vigilant self.

Perhaps you have been to a SAL Friday Night Dinner and Sunday Breakfast, but I’m not sure if you realize how much work goes into the preparation and serving of these meals. **Dave McBrien’s** Friday crew includes **Chiara and Ava** from the **Junior Shooters**. Dave and his Sunday crew are pictured below. All of these people take time from their regular jobs and lives to help serve Veterans and Veteran charities. Feel free to stick your head in the kitchen and tell them what a bang-up job they are doing, maybe ask them when you can volunteer, and remember your generosity in the tip can is always greatly appreciated. Thank a Vet when you see one.



Thank You Sunday Breakfast Volunteers



Chip Reidmiller, Rick Korona, Nancy Marshall, Steve Petersen, Britney Ness, Dave McBrien, Mike Lawton, Dan Kimble.



Growing Up on a Nebraska Farm in the 1920s and '30s

By Harold A. Nelson

I was born Harold Arthur Nelson on February 28, 1915 to parents Andrew and Louise, and grew up on my family's subsistence farm three miles outside the small town of Wolbach, Nebraska. After graduating from high school, I stayed on the farm helping my parents until I was drafted into the Army on July 14, 1941 at age 26.

My four siblings and I attended a one-room country school before transferring to a Wolbach school that required a three mile walk to and from each day.

Seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, we went to bed right after dinner and got up at 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. We kids had to milk at least one of our dozen cows before school. Our daily chores included feeding the livestock and chickens. The horses also had to be curried and harnessed for the day's farm work.

By that time, mother had the kitchen stove fired up by stoking it with kerosene-soaked corn cobs, the only source of fuel for cooking and warming the kitchen. In winter, a coal furnace heated the entire house.

The wind in winter would drift all the roads shut and blow through keyholes in doors. Mother always kept a cloth iron on the stove which we took to bed on winter nights to keep our feet warm. Sometimes we'd wake up to snow on top of our quilts that had sifted through the upstairs windows.

Breakfast usually consisted of oatmeal, bacon, eggs, and pancakes. Mother fixed us lunch boxes with leftovers from dinner or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. After butchering we had liverwurst, tongue, and heart sandwiches, all on homemade bread. Sometimes she would put a homemade oatmeal cookie in our lunch boxes. We drank water from the pump at school.

We had to begin our walk to school by 8:00 a.m.

in order to arrive by 9:00. My first teacher was Mabel Newman. She walked a mile to school from her

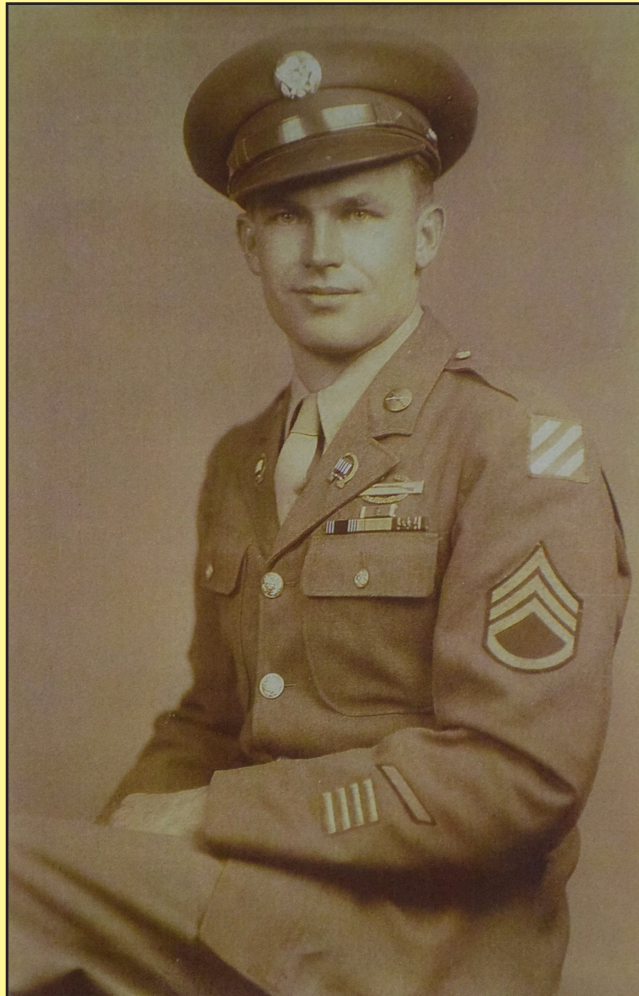
house arriving in time to get the coal fire going on cold days. She taught all eight grades. She had to be janitor, nurse, baby sitter, chaplain, and teacher for 50 children. In the eighth grade I had taken all the classes offered, so I got to read the school's new set of World Book Encyclopedias. They were more like stories, and were very interesting.

We had a 15-minute recess in the morning and afternoon, and a 30-minute lunch break. Weather permitting we all went outside during break time and played Mumblety-peg, marbles, and "HandiHiOver," a game of throwing something over the school house for those on the other side to catch. The school was at the bottom of a prairie hill covered with grass. My Dad made a kind of

sled using two oak barrel staves fastened together and polished the outside. We sat on it and slid down the hill. It was great fun.

As near as I can recall, Christmas was our only time off. I don't remember any graduation celebration. We simply got your report cards and went on our way. My two younger sisters, Helen and Mildred, became teachers, which you could do right out of high school. Irene, my oldest sister, went to college and became a stenographer. My brother George left the farm and became a carpenter.

At 4:00 p.m. we began the three-mile walk home from school. The first thing we did when we got home was to pick up all the corn cobs left by feeding the hogs and stack them in the kitchen. Then it was time to milk the cows again. Sometimes Mother would have a snack waiting for us before we started chores. One of our favorites was leftover pancakes from breakfast that she buttered, sprinkled with sugar,



and rolled up. She had dinner ready about 8:00 p.m. We normally ate homegrown vegetables, potatoes, and one meat (chicken, pork, rabbit, or pheasant), and maybe a piece of pie made from our own grown fruit. Sometimes she made a pot of bean soup.

My Dad gave me a .22 rifle and a carton of shells for my 8th grade graduation. I would go upstairs, aim out of a window, and with one shot we had our pheasant for vegetable soup. All our food was grown on the farm, with staples like flour, sugar, and salt purchased on our infrequent trips to town. We raised our own potatoes and vegetables.

Butchering a hog was time consuming and hard work. First we cut its throat so it bled to death. Then it had to be scalded in a large copper boiler on the kitchen stove or by a coal fire in a barrel so the hair could be rubbed off by hand. The hog was then cut open and the heart, liver,

and entrails removed. Not the best job. The heart was boiled and sliced to make sandwiches for school lunches. The liver was either fired or made into liverwurst sausage. The tongue was also boiled and sliced for sandwiches. The intestines were turned inside out, scraped and washed, then filled with seasoned ground meat scraps. The brains were seasoned and fried. Mother loved them. The feet, toes, and nails were made into glue. My Dad made all our furniture using homemade glue. The rest of the head was cooked and made into head cheese, which I didn't like.

Meat couldn't be kept fresh, except for some in winter that we hung on the north side of the house for a while to keep it frozen. Otherwise it was canned or the bacon was covered completely with salt and placed in a crock. It was too salty to eat, so it was boiled in milk before frying.

I dug a 10 by 10-foot pit 6 feet deep and when the snow was wet in Spring we shoveled snow into the wagon then shoveled it into the pit. To took wagon load after wagon load to fill the pit. The snow was then covered with straw and my Dad built a roof to cover it and keep out the rain. During the summer,

we put the snow in a wooden ice box to keep our food cold. We had no electricity.

We had terrible lightning storms on the farm. It struck the chimney on the farmhouse, the barn in two places, the hog shed in three places killing 11 hogs, but it never started a fire. It struck a telephone pole 12 feet from the house so many times all that was left was a sliver. It's a wonder we weren't struck while out in the fields when those storms hit.

In 1934, at the height of the dust bowl, there wasn't a drop of rain all summer, until September when we got half an inch. The corn planted in May only got three inches tall, then froze. There was

nothing green all summer. Pastures were bare. We had to ship our cattle 100 miles north to Sandhills where there was some grass. The grasshoppers were starving and flying so thick they almost obscured the sun. They'd land

on my hatband to get moisture, and ate the bark off all our orchard trees, killing them. Some farmers put grasshopper catchers on the front of their vehicles and caught bushels of them to feed their chickens.

Most of our clothes were hand-me-downs. We dressed for warmth in winter, but the girls always wore dresses with long underwear, long socks, and overshoes when it was cold. We wore our shoes until they had holes in the soles, then Dad would put cardboard in the bottoms. During the winter he half-soled our shoes and repaired the harnesses for our horses. At Christmas we usually got a needed item of clothing from the Wards or Sears Catalogues. A Russian Thistle decorated with strings of popped corn was our Christmas tree.

Selling cream and eggs was one of our few sources of income. That required a three-mile horse and buggy or wagon trip on a Saturday to our little town of Wolbach, population five or six hundred. We'd pick up mail at the post office and buy clothing and food that couldn't be raised on the farm. It was also a time for farmers to get together and visit, play pool or cards, and smoke cigars while the women went shop-



My sister, Helen, and Shep the dog with me and the wagon on our farm.

ping and collected all the local gossip. We kids would walk round and round on the sidewalks, which were concrete. Main street was dirt and a muddy mess at times. The horses were tied to a hitching post waiting for time to go back home. Dad would give each of us a penny to buy candy that lasted all week. There was a silent movie theater, but we didn't have the five or ten cents to go see the shows, which often featured Tom Mix or Hoot Gibson.

The trip was often a problem in winter as the few dirt roads were filled with snow, so we went cross-country as best as possible. One time our buggy upset throwing me into a fence. The cream and most of the 12 dozen eggs survived, but I got a cut on my head from the barbed wire. In winter, my Dad would wear a sheepskin coat, sheepskin shoes, and cap. Mother wore about all the clothes she had, and both would cover up with a quilt made from horsehides. There was straw in the wagon for us kids to lie on or cover up with. When our horse, "Good Ol' Dick," died we used his hide in the wagon and my Dad had mittens made from it that went to his elbows.

Summer traveling wasn't all that bad. As we got older, my brother and I would walk to town after doing our chores and visit with our friends. Sometimes there were dances on Saturday night, but when it got cold the potbelly stove could not heat the room.

In addition to a post office and movie theater, our little town had a creamery that bought our cream and eggs, a hardware store, dry goods store, a couple livery stables, a meat processing plant, a barbershop, an ice house that got its ice from a small pond outside town, two banks, three churches, a pool hall that didn't serve liquor, a kind of restaurant, a community hall, a volunteer fire station, and two gas stations where gas was 9 cents per gallon. The year I was born a loaf of bread cost seven cents, a pound of butter was 36 cents, a half gallon of milk was 10

cents, 10 pounds of potatoes were 15 cents, a one-pound round steak was 23 cents, and a new Ford cost \$440.00, if you could afford it.

Annually, ground farming started in May first by hand shoveling or forking the manure left by our

livestock. It was put into a spreader and spread onto the fields. The ground was then plowed with a one-furrow walking plow pulled by three horses. We had acres to plant in corn, oats, barley, alfalfa, and spring wheat. Next the ground had to be smoothed out with a little harrow—another walking job. Grain was then planted by a grain drill—finally a riding machine.

After planting the corn and grain, the alfalfa was ready to harvest. It was used to feed the cattle while the horses grazed on wild grass. Alfalfa had to be cut with a horse-drawn mower then let dry and raked into rows which were then swept up with the forks of a hay stacker and hoisted overhead using horses. It was put into stacks which Mother stayed on top of to level out. I had the job of driving the horses to lift up the hay and dump it onto the stack. Once in a while I covered my Mother in hay by accident. Did I catch heck!

Corn was cultivated three times during its life using a walking cultivator to remove weeds and keep the soil loose. It was harvested by hand. Oats were cut and bundled by a grain blinder. The bundles were then set up into piles called chokes where it dried until time to be run through a thrashing machine to get the grain. Oats were either sold or fed to the horses, which they loved.

Come New Year's, maybe we could relax a little, except there were still the usual daily chores that had to be done. Despite the hardships, it was a great time growing up on the farm in the 1920s and 30s. We didn't have much, but lived with what we had and enjoyed life. I am very grateful.

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The barn on our farm my Dad with help from my brother and me built still stands. Our job was to straighten out the nails from our old barn which had been torn down. Dad was an excellent woodworker and built all the buildings on our farm. He also helped build the pews in the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City using wooden pegs instead of nails.

Harold Nelson, continued from page 1

"Today's event is one of the most incredible things I've done since joining the Army 34 years ago," said Major General Charles D. Costanza, Commanding General of the 3rd Infantry Division during the ceremony for Harold on October 4th at Ft. Carson. "I'm honored and honestly humbled to have the privilege to present the Silver Star to a fellow Dogface Soldier," said Costanza in reference to the nickname that came to define members of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division.

Harold received the Silver Star Medal "for his conspicuous gallantry and uncommon heroism while under fire which were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 3rd ID and the U.S. Army."

The 3rd ID's Marne Hall of Fame recognizes Dogface Soldiers that served and left a lasting impact within the 104-year-old organization, and for his service, valor, and achievements the 3rd ID also inducted Harold Nelson into the Marne Hall of Fame class of 2022.

The Army Board for Corrections of Military Records awarded Harold Nelson the Silver Star based on a letter from his then-commander, Capt. James Pearman Jr., giv-

ing a detailed account of combat with 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd ID during which Harold, under heavy enemy fire, ran across an open area to a U.S.

Army tank abandoned after hitting a mine. As he climbed atop, a German hand grenade blew off his back pack. Seeing that the tank's machine gun still had a clip of ammunition, Harold returned fire at the enemy until they were "suppressed" allowing his men to move to safety.

"He was standing up on this abandoned German tank," said Costanza, "firing that turret machine gun and a German soldier came behind him and threw a grenade right behind him and

it blew the backpack literally off of his back. And he wasn't rooted and he just kept on like it was a mosquito, he just kept firing on that house where the Germans were at."

Shortly after the incident, Harold's hometown newspaper printed the following story under the headline "Resourceful Sergeant."

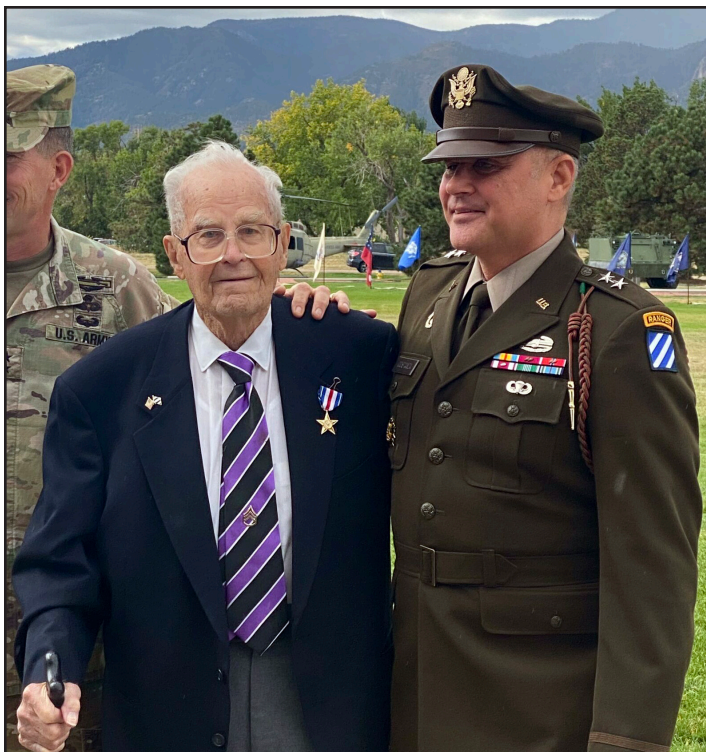
"Sgt. Harold A. Nelson, Wolback, Neb., was using his tommy gun and grenades effectively on German troops in close combat recently when he ran out of ammunition. Looking about for reinforcements, he spotted an abandoned American tank nearby, separated from



Harold Nelson received his Silver Medal from Maj. Gen. Charles Costanza in a Ft. Carson ceremony. —Photo by Dave Dupree



Friends, family, and military officials numbered upwards of 150 at Harold Nelson's Silver Star Medal ceremony at Fort Carson, Colorado, Oct. 4th, 2022. —Photo by Dave Dupree



Harold poses wearing his Silver Star and presenter Maj. Gen. Charles Costanza

—Photo by Dave Dupree

him by an open space of 30 feet. He dashed across the opening, climbed in the tank and turned its machine guns on the Germans. They were eliminated. “I would have fired the big gun on the tank,” he said, “but I didn’t know how to shoot the blame thing.”

Harold has never boasted about his combat accomplishments. Instead he humbly diverts recognition to those around him. “All my men, they were really good,” said Harold. “They were good to me and they were good combat men too. I appreciate them.”

He took care of his men, often relying on the skills he learned while growing up on a farm in Nebraska.



The 4th Infantry Division's Mountain Color Guard stood watch at Harold Nelson's Silver Star Medal ceremony.

—Photo by Bernabe Lopez III, U.S. Army Media

“Nobody knew how to milk a cow but me, so I milked a couple of helmets full of milk and give it to my men,” he gleefully recounted. “That was the best drink they had, beyond beer.”

“The 3rd Infantry Division fought for 635 straight days in combat, and took over 35,000 casualties during WWII,” Costanza noted. “I’ve served five tours in Iraq, but I never saw combat like he saw,” he continued. “I mean, 635 straight days of nonstop combat. My service can’t compare to what he’s done. Nelson is the golden standard for those who serve.”

Costanza also cites one of Harold’s several other displays of valor when describing the type of soldier he was. “He was hit by a piece of shrapnel in his chest,” he said. “That didn’t stop him. He just pulled that out and kept on fighting. He did the same when he was grazed in the stomach by a bullet. He chose to put his men above himself and kept on fighting.”

Harold served with F Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division and was part of Operation Torch in Morocco, an Allied mission intended to draw Axis forces away from the Eastern Front in northern Europe. He also participated in Operation Husky in Sicily, and operations Avalanche and Shingle in Italy following the invasion of Northern Africa. He made six different amphibious landings in Africa and Italy, all under intense enemy fire. In addition to the Silver Star, Harold has received two Purple Hearts.

When he and his men were almost within sight of Rome, they were forced to withdraw and establish a defense which they held for “four hellish months” before breaking out and fighting their way to the Eternal City. He was in Rome preparing to regroup and

The Saga of Harold's Helmet

The helmet Harold Nelson wore for three years during WWII tells a remarkable story, so he had it recreated after throwing away the original “because it would no longer hold water.”

According to Harold, the helmet saved his life at least three times; once while he was shoulder-deep in Italy’s Volturno River and a bullet went through the side just above his ear, once in Sicily when a bullet left its mark in the back of his helmet (“I must have been retreating”), and one time when his convoy truck went over backwards leaving a large dent in it as evidence.

“If it weren’t for my helmet, I wouldn’t be here!”





Francis Tate and Harold began a marriage lasting almost 50 years the same month he returned from combat.

—Nelson Family Photo

training for the invasion of southern France when he received word that he would be going home on a rotation furlough. “It was the best thing I’d heard in my two years overseas.”

He arrived back in the U.S. with a severe case of “trench mouth” that was treated at Ft. Logan in Colorado. After recovering, he received a seven-day furlough and went back home to visit his parents and Francis Tate, the sweetheart he’d left behind in Nebraska. “Bless her heart, she waited for me after almost four years. I guess the shock was so great we decided to get married that week,” Harold said. They were married by a justice of the peace in Smith Center, Kansas on Sept. 19, 1945. “We didn’t have a fancy wedding but it lasted almost 50 years and we had two lovely daughters, Carolee and Patricia.”

Harold was discharged from the Army in July of 1945. Only he and six other members of his company made it home from the war. He and Francis settled in Denver and raised their family. He took a job as a painter making 39 cents an hour at a biscuit company that eventually sold to Keebler. He spent 33 years with Keebler Company Bakery as maintenance foreman, maintenance engineer, and finally project engineer. “I

invented a machine that rolled cracker dough thin then ‘lapped’ it into layers,” he said. “The process made their crackers crispy, tender, and crunchy. Keebler named it ‘The Nelson Lapper.’”

Harold learned he’d been recommended for a Silver Star in a May 1944 letter his commanding officer sent to his mother, who passed it on to him. “He just kind of put it away, because for a long time after he got back from the war he didn’t want to talk about any part of it,” said Carolee Soden. “Even as children, we never heard any of his war stories.”

Years passed before Harold’s stories began to pour out, among them the long-ago Silver Star letter. After some prompting from Carolee, Harold decided he’d re-



An emotional Carolee Soden, Harold’s daughter, never gave up in her zeal to get Harold the medal he deserves.

—Photo by Jerilee Bennett, The Gazette



Air Force Col. (ret.) Hall Mund and SAL member Dave Dupree represented Post 178 at Harold Nelson's Silver Star Award Ceremony at Ft. Carson. Harold is a longtime member of the Lakewood American Legion.



—Photos by Dave Dupree and Carolee Soden

ally like to have a Silver Star. But his quest to receive the award was hampered indefinitely due to a 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis that destroyed as many as 18 million files dating back to 1912, making it extremely difficult to trace WWII veterans. The loss also makes it impossible to determine definitely whether Harold is the oldest living Colorado

WWII veteran, a distinction which he likely holds.

After years of pleading with the military through countless calls and letters, Carolee and Harold eventually gave up hope. "We had tried every route we knew and didn't know where else to turn," said Carolee. However, the Forgotten Heroes Campaign, a nonprofit organization that fights for veterans who were awarded medals they never received, continued the effort.

"Daddy called me one day in June, 2022 and said, 'Well, I guess the Army finally decided to give me my Silver Star,'" said Carolee. Nearly 80 years after his service, Harold was finally going to receive his Silver Star.

"I've been trying for many, many years to find a way to get this for him, and nearly 80 years after his service it's finally happened." She spent much of the award ceremony dabbing at happy tears as she sat beside her father. "I am having trouble realizing it is really happening."

"I appreciate what they have done. It's a wonderful thing," said Harold after the ceremony. "I guess it means I did what I was supposed to do. This moment means I've had a great life, a great family and great friends," he added. "And a lot of fun throughout the years."

"Harold Nelson served our nation with honor and distinction and I am grateful that we could honor his service today," concluded Costanza. "It is important to ensure that the service and sacrifice of our veterans, those whose shoulders we stand upon now, is never overlooked or forgotten. Harold is a Dogface Soldier and I'm proud to call myself one too."

"I can't believe it," Harold said. "I didn't know I was that important."

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Sources: Stephanie Earls, The Gazette; KKTV 11 News, Colorado Springs; KUSA TV 9 News, Denver; and Colorado Public Radio News.

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Harold Nelson; patriot, hero, and national treasure.

—Photo by Dave Dupree