

# THE 297<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION

## A LEGACY OF COURAGE

BY MARI IPPOLITO

**M**y father, Tony Ippolito, and the men of the 297th Combat Engineer Battalion are my heroes. The 297th was part of Operation Overlord (D-Day) and the men were awarded five battle stars for having served in The Ardennes, Central Europe, Normandy, Northern France, and The Rhineland. The “men in front of the men behind the gun” also took part in the liberation at Nordhausen.



Mari with Cecil Delaney, left, and her dad, Tony, at a 297th Engineer Reunion.



Mari's favorite photo of her dad and his comrades during the war – Tony (holding bucket) and the guys have a moment of being the boys inside the soldiers.

### A DIFFICULT HOMECOMING

For those who returned, coming home wasn't an easy transition. They dealt with high unemployment, re-joining families that had limited ability to under-

stand what they'd seen, as well as dealing with post-traumatic stress with no help for what was at the time termed “battle fatigue.” Yet they returned to the U.S. to raise the next generation.

### ONCE COMRADES, NOW FAMILY

My dad and the men he served with made it possible for my generation to grow up in freedom and peace. They taught me to love and respect my country and those who serve it. The bonds they formed during the war years have continued into the fourth generation of our families. My “297th siblings” and I alternated hosting reunions until our dads were too old or infirm to attend, and many of our families remain close to this day.

They have always and will always be my heroes. I'm proud to be a part of the 297th Combat Engineer Family, and I'm honored to be a descendant of these heroes.



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Tony Ippolito writes home from WWII.

*Sadly, Mari's Dad, Tony, died Saturday, April 7, at 97 years young in his sleep from natural causes. He was delighted to know this article was running in THE EXCHANGE. Our condolences go to Mari and her family.*

## Jack's Service *(Continued from page 10)*

### NEXT STEPS

Jack is very excited about receiving his commission and getting out into the Fleet. He's already thinking about life aboard a ship and talking to a lot of other personnel who've had experience serving on the Lake Champlain. The biggest anticipation is getting his Orders Packet and finding out his report date, which could be within a few days of graduation or a couple of months.

As we honor and remember those who have given the ultimate sacrifice, let's not forget those who are ready to stand and serve as the next generation of leaders, no matter what military branch. As Travis Manion, fallen 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, USMC, US Naval Academy Graduate, who paid the ultimate sacrifice, once said, “If not me, then who...”\*



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TRAVIS MANION  
FOUNDATION

**T**he Travis Manion Foundation is near and dear to us. It's a foundation set up after the passing of Travis Manion in 2007 and Brendan Looney in 2010. Both were 2004 USNA graduates and best friends. Travis went Marine Corps and Brendan became a US Navy Seal. Travis passed away in 2007 and when Brendan passed in 2010, the families decided to place them side-by-side at Arlington National Cemetery. They were Brothers in Arms and now Brothers Forever. The foundation is meant to empower veterans and families of fallen heroes to develop character in future generations. Jack, along with many USNA Midshipmen, live by Travis's motto of “If Not Me, Then Who.”

**For more information on the Travis Manion Foundation, go to [travismanion.org](http://travismanion.org).**