



164th Infantry Association of the United States
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For Immediate release

Last Surviving WWII Veteran of Famous N.D. National Guard Unit **164th Infantry Regiment Passes Away**

Douglas P, "Doug" Burtell

Bismarck, N.D. - The last North Dakota National Guard World War II (WWII) Soldier known to be residing in North Dakota died in Bowman on April 3, just weeks shy of his 97th birthday. Douglas P, "Doug" Burtell, who served in the famed 164th Infantry Regiment, was the last original member of the unit residing in North Dakota.

Burtell was only 16 years old when he joined the North Dakota National Guard in Fargo in late 1940. Assigned to the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Section of the Infantry Regiment he was trained to interpret aerial photographs, draw maps based on reconnaissance patrols, and analyze captured materials.

"I sadly note that our ranks have grown smaller by one with the passing of Doug Burtell", said "Vern Fetch, president of the 164th Infantry Association. "I remember fondly that Doug attended the final 164th Association reunion in Bismarck on Oct. 14, 2017. He will be greatly missed by our few remaining members, most of whom joined the 164th later in WWII or served during the Korean War."

Burtell was one of 1,723 Soldiers of the 164th Infantry Regiment that mobilized in February 1941 for a year of training at Camp Claiborne, La. The United States entered the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941 and ten months later, the regiment would sail into history as the first U.S. Army unit to offensively engage the enemy when they landed at Guadalcanal on Oct. 13, 1942, to reinforce the 1st Marine Division.

His artwork help tell the every day stories of the Soldiers as they fought their way through islands in the South Pacific. Burtell was recently honored when the North Dakota adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Al Dohrmann, announced that one of his sketches would be featured on his new recognition coin. Other artwork by Burtell is etched in granite on the 164th Infantry Regiment Memorial located at the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery, his final resting place.

Burial will be at the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery, Thursday, April 8 at 3 p.m. The public and media are invited. No pre-coordination is required.

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Note: Burtell's artwork on the North Dakota adjutant general's recognition coin was featured in the March 19, 2021 edition of the North Dakota National Guard's weekly publication "[The TAG Line](#)".

Obituary

Doug P. Burtell

April 16, 1924 - April 3, 2021

Douglas "Doug" P. Burtell, 96, of Bowman, ND, passed away on April 3, 2021 at the Southwest Healthcare Long Term Center in Bowman.

Mass of Christian Burial for Doug will be on Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. M.S.T. at the St. Charles Catholic Church in Bowman. Fr. Paul Eberle will celebrate the Mass with burial to follow in the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery in Mandan, ND, at 3:00 p.m. C.S.T. There will be a Rosary and Vigil Service for Doug on Wednesday, April 7, 2021 at the St. Charles Catholic Church beginning at 7:00 p.m. Visitation for Doug will begin on Wednesday, April 7, 2021 at 12:00 noon.

Douglas Peter Burtell was born April 16, 1924 to Peter and Lydia Burtell, in Casselton, North Dakota, the middle of five children. For unknown reasons, Doug was known as Bob to his family and friends growing up, causing some to speculate that his wife had been married before when she referenced these two men. He attended elementary school and started high school in Casselton, working as farm hand and other odd jobs. As many other young men during the late Depression years, Doug joined the North Dakota National Guard, although he was only 16.

When World War II began, the North Dakota guard was mobilized as the 164th Infantry and began service in the South Pacific Theater. Doug served on Guadalcanal, Bougainville and the Philippine Islands, being wounded in action and receiving the Purple Heart. He was very proud of his service, and was the last surviving member of the ND 164th Infantry. Doug was in Headquarters company and served in reconnaissance, primarily due to his artistic skill in map making. In keeping with his artistic bent, he made many sketches to be later turned into paintings chronicling the 164th's time in service. Many of his paintings are scattered around the state, including the 164th monument at the Veteran's Cemetery in Mandan, ND.

After the war, like many other servicemen, Doug returned to North Dakota and began rebuilding America. He met Cecilia Michalski and they were married in August, 1946. He got his GED from NDAC (NDSU) and attended art school at the Minneapolis Art Institute. Deciding that being tied to a drawing board as a commercial artist was not for him, Doug began working in the lumber industry, selling wholesale millwork for Dakota Sash and Door in Fargo. Upon retirement, he worked selling campers in Fargo before moving to Bowman to be nearer his daughter, Barb and her family. In Bowman, he continued his painting, giving many paintings to friends in the area, wildlife and western life being two of his favorite subjects. Cec used to say her walls were constantly changing, because if someone admired a painting, it often went home with them. Cec passed away in 2005 unexpectedly.

Doug became friends with Betty Miller and they enjoyed many years companionship. Betty was a true comfort to Doug to the end of his days, and is much loved by our family.

Doug was preceded in death by his parents, and siblings, Sid, Verlen, and Phyllis. He is survived by his sister, Marv, of Billings, Montana, and his nieces and nephews. He is also survived by his daughter Barb, her husband Steve Conley and their daughters, Kate, (Justin) Gartner and their children, Baylee and Bryce; and Jill (Eleno) Vallejo and their children, Alayna, Kylee and Mya. Also preceding Doug were his many furry friends, lastly being "Buster".

In lieu of flowers, a donation to the Bowman or Rhame American Legion, or a charity of your choice is suggested.

Krebsbach and Kulseth Funeral Services of Bowman in Charge of the arrangements.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY/LEGACY – 164th Infantry Regiment

The 164th Infantry Regiment

All of North Dakota was affected by the mobilization of the 164th Infantry. The regiment was located in 17 communities throughout North Dakota: Fargo, Devils Lake, Harvey, Lisbon, Bottineau, Bismarck, Cavalier, Grafton, Rugby, Cando, Williston, Carrington, Valley City, Jamestown, Edgeley, Dickinson, and Wahpeton.

At Guadalcanal, the newly issued M1 Garand rifles outshined the bolt action Springfield 1903 used by the Maines as waves of Japanese assaulted the perimeter Henderson Field, the strategic airfield on the island. The Regiment earned the Navy Presidential Unit Citation for that Battle.

The 164th then participated in campaigns Bougainville in 1944, and Leyte, Cebu, Bohol, Mindanao in 1945, earning 4 bronze 'battle' stars on the Asiatic Pacific Campaign ribbon and serving over 600 days in contact with the enemy. The Regiment was slated to spearhead the invasion of Japan as part of Operation Olympic when the war ended.

An estimated 2000 replacements from every state in the nation transferred in and out of the Regiment during the 3 years of battle. A number of them reside in other states. Only one other original North Dakota National Guard member may still be alive in California, but efforts to contact him or his family have been unsuccessful.

The 164th Infantry Association

The 164th Infantry Association of the United States of America hosted reunions all over the nation from 1955 to 2017, the last few of those years settling in Fargo, Valley City, and Bismarck. The Association hosted the North Dakota World War II Victory Celebration in 2015 to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the end of the war, as well as the grand event to mark the 75th Anniversary of the 164th Infantry Regiment's landing at Guadalcanal at the final reunion in 2017.

The legacy of the 164th Infantry began before statehood. The 1st North Dakota Militia was formed in 1883, became the 1st North Dakota Infantry Regiment, North Dakota National Guard upon Statehood in 1889. The Regiment served honorably as the 1st North Dakota Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish American War/Philippine American War in 1898-1899, with nine soldiers earning Congressional Medals of Honor. The 1st North Dakota served on the Mexican Border in 1916, then was renamed the 164th Infantry Regiment during the mobilization for service in France during World War I. Just 5 years after returning from World War II, the Regiment, along with other ND National Guard units, was mobilized for the Korean War and served as a training unit at Camp Rucker, AL.

The Association has preserved the rich history of the 164th Infantry Regiment by printing a newsmagazine, publishing a book, erecting a memorial at the North Dakota Veterans Cemetery, encouraging the naming of the 164th Infantry Memorial Highway (Highway 2), and establishing the 164th Infantry Archives at the University of North Dakota.