

This author previously wrote an article that listed Bridgewater's most decorated soldiers from World War II. My sources were old newspapers. One article in particular told that Charles Foggiano, who lived on Pluckemin Road in Bridgewater, had been awarded the Silver Star as he knocked out two German machine gun nests in a battle in France. In addition to the Silver Star, he had been awarded The Combat Infantryman's Badge. That, by my unofficial research, makes him Bridgewater's most decorated soldier in World War II. That sparked my curiosity. Who was he? And what ever happened to him? In order to try to obtain information about him I make calls to my network of local senior citizens. But they have no knowledge of him. So I reason that I will have to search myself. I realize the odds of him being alive are slim (less than 10% of World War II veterans are still with us today) and the odds of finding him are very low. But Bridgewater's most decorated soldier in World War II is indeed worth a few searches on the internet. As it turns out, it took just one search. On the "whitepages.com" a search on his name brought up one record. It said a 90 year old Charles Foggiano lived in North Carolina - and his phone number was on the screen in front of me. A quick call and I have found him. Charles Foggiano, Bridgewater's forgotten recipient of The Silver Star, has been located - and he is glad to talk with me.

Charles grew up in Bridgewater where he attended the Greenknoll School. That building is today the old wing of the Municipal building. He also attended Somerville High School. After High School with the war raging, he joined the army. His training in the military was first at Fort Dix and then at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. After that he was sent to England to fill in as a replacement in the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. They trained for months for the upcoming invasion of Europe. Finally, on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944 they would land on the beaches of Normandy, France, in a battle that has come to be known as D-Day. The 29<sup>th</sup> had the unfortunate assignment of landing at Omaha Beach where the enemy defenses were the strongest. Days before the landing the U.S. Air Force had intensely bombed the German defensive positions on the beach. That should have eased the landing for the 29<sup>th</sup>, but almost all the bombs had landed too far inland and the German bunkers and pillboxes remained untouched. Charles Foggiano described his unit's landing on D-Day as a "turkey shoot" and they were the turkeys. Half his company that landed on the beach became casualties. But through determination, the U.S. troops that landed at Omaha beach that day, would eventually overrun the German defenses and establish themselves on the beachhead.

With the beaches at Normandy secured the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry would march through France toward the final goal of Berlin, Germany. That march would not be easy. The landscape in France heavily favored the defenders. For along the sides of most roads were hedgerows – large thick bushes that gave cover to the enemy. As they moved forward the 29<sup>th</sup> came upon the French town of St. Lo which was occupied by the Germans. St. Lo was a strategic crossroad – a vital location that they needed to control. Thus the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry were given orders to take the town away from the Germans. Charles recalled that just before their entry upon the edge of the town that the U. S. Air Force heavily bombed the town. These bombs landed accurately reducing many building to rubble. But this unfortunately helped the defending Germans, as the piles of bricks and debris gave them strong positions to defend from. The battle at St. Lo was a tough one. It has become legendary.

On July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1944, while still fighting for control of St. Lo, Charles, in the midst of a scouting mission, found himself in a tough situation. Two enemy machine nests began firing on his

company. Some of the men were hit -- and were now injured. He and others quickly took cover. He decided that these machine gun nests had to be taken out. Despite heavy machine gun fire, he moved forward toward the location of the enemy gun positions. When he got close enough he threw hand grenades. These were long throws, but training had served him well, and his tosses found their mark. The previously deadly firing positions went silent. He and his men would live to continue the fight.

Later in the battle at St. Lo, an enemy shell exploded close to him. It hit him hard - knocking him down. While lying on the ground he found that his femur - the upper bone in his leg - was broken in half. Fortunately medics were quickly on the scene and moved him by stretcher to safety. Charles, to this day, credits the medics for the fine job they did. With a compound fracture, he was sent to a hospital in England. He found the hospital was designed for those with leg injuries as it had ramps everywhere and no stairs. Soon the Lieutenant from his company would join him as a patient in that hospital. Charles had a bad injury, thus he spent a few months in the hospital. He was lucky in a way as he was told that if he had sustained that injury in World War I (25 years before) he would have lost the leg. A steel brace inserted into his leg would allow him to recover enough to walk, but not enough to fight again, so he was discharged from the army. Upon his discharge, he was informed that he was being awarded The Silver Star for his heroics that day at St. Lo. In addition to the Silver Star – he was awarded *The Purple Heart* for his injury and *The Combat Infantryman's Badge* for his actions at Normandy.

He returned to Bridgewater and would work over 30 years as government inspector before retiring. In the late 1970s he moved to Tennessee. Then 8 years ago he moved to North Carolina. While he has been gone from here for some time, he fondly remembers his days in the Bridgewater / Raritan area. He especially recalled attending the unveiling of the Basilone Statue in 1948. And he said there was a special restaurant that he really missed it was called Delucia's Brick Oven Pizza. This author informed him that it was still open – and delicious as ever.

When Charles was asked if anyone from this area had ever contacted him to have him tell his heroic war story, he said no. But that did not bother him as he said the real heroes from those battles are still there - buried in the various U.S. Military Cemeteries throughout Europe.

The 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry had quite an adventure and high casualty rate. They have been the subject of many movies and video games. The division's exploits on Omaha Beach are featured prominently in the 1962 film "The Longest Day" as well as in the 1998 film "Saving Private Ryan". The division's advance through Normandy and Europe is featured in the popular video games *Close Combat*, *Company of Heroes*, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, and *Call of Duty 3*.