

**Biography of PFC Louie Hernandez
1919-1944**

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Early Life

Louie Hernandez was born January 28, 1919 in Pueblo, Colorado to Antonio and Marianna Hernandez. Both Marianna and Antonio were originally from Mexico, having immigrated to the United States in 1910 and 1912. In 1921, the Hernandez family, including Louie and his two brothers, John and Manuel, moved from Las Animas County to Gill, Colorado. Gill is a small, rural community near Greeley, Colorado that was established in 1911 and named for William H. Gill, an early landowner. Louie attended the Gill School in Weld County, completing one year of high school before dropping out to begin work as a farm hand on three beet farms in the area.¹ Manuel, Louie's older brother, was also a beet laborer during this time and the two likely worked together throughout the 1930s. Louie's brothers, John and Manuel, would both ultimately move to the Denver area, but their parents remained in Gill throughout their adult lives. The Hernandez family was devoutly Catholic and grew tremendously over the years. At the time of Marianna's passing in 1959, she was survived by her remaining sons, John and Manuel, 10 grandchildren, and 18 great grandchildren.²

Entry Into Service

On November 24, 1942 Louie was drafted into the United States army in Denver and was inducted less than one week later on November 30th.³ Following his induction, Louie was sent to Texas for basic training before he was assigned to the 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division in Georgia in the spring of 1943. Louie was

¹ Obituary of Louie Hernandez, "Gill Soldier is Killed in Normandy," *Greeley Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1944.

² Obituary of Marianna Hernandez, *Greeley Daily Tribune*, December 26, 1959.

³ Obituary of Louie Hernandez, *Greeley Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1944.

assigned to D (Dog) Company, a heavy weapons company of the 1st Battalion. In the spring of 1943, the 4th Infantry Division, including the 22nd, 12th, and 8th Regiments, was the only experimental Motorized Infantry Division in the United States army.⁴ This experimental division was modeled after the Panzergrenadier Divisions of the German Wehrmacht and initially intended to be used in the North African Campaign. Their motorized training took place in Ft. Gordon, Georgia where they trained to learn tactics for moving quickly over rough terrain and dismounting, at which point they would behave as any other infantry regiment.⁵ Their training was initially so undersupplied that they practiced without half-tracks. When the plan to send them to Africa fell through in the fall of 1942 due to lack of available shipping capacity, the army made the decision to scrap the motorized division entirely and the 22nd was converted back to a standard infantry division.⁶

The 22nd was then sent to Ft. Dix, New Jersey, where they spent the summer of 1943 training before, once again, heading south. Eventually, the 22nd was sent to Camp Gordon Johnston in Florida to complete amphibious training from September to November 1943.⁷ While in Florida, the men trained in what they would describe as a “snake infested swap area” in the Gulf of Mexico.⁸ The men trained with landing crafts, practiced moving from bigger to smaller ships, and completed all of the typical rifle and

⁴ Famous Fourth: The Story of the 4th Infantry Division Pamphlet, April 28, 1947, 22.

⁵ Babcock, Robert (National 4th Infantry Division Historian), interview with Cassie Moore, notes of conversation, May 24, 2019.

⁶ Reorganization and Redesignation of the 4th Motorized Division, Headquarters of the Motorized Division, Office of the Division Commander, August 3, 1943.

⁷ History of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division to The Commanding General, 4th Infantry Division, January 8, 1944.

⁸ Babcock, Robert interview with Cassie Moore, May 24, 2019.

physical training required of an infantry division. Their training in Florida was ultimately preparing them for the invasion of Normandy. In November 1943, Louie and his company were moved to Fort Jackson, South Carolina to begin their preparation for heading overseas.⁹ Here the men received physicals, necessary shots, detailed their next of kin, and completed any necessary paperwork, such as life insurance beneficiaries, to ensure that all was in order before their departure to England. While in South Carolina, Louie was awarded the Good Conduct Medal in Orders on December 31, 1943.¹⁰

According to the *United States Army Human Resources Command*, the Good Conduct Medal in Orders “is awarded for exemplary behavior, efficiency, and fidelity in active Federal military service.”

Louie’s parents believed he had left for England in November 1943, but this was actually when he was transferred to South Carolina to begin his processing for departure.¹¹ His obituary notes that he was able to visit his parents before leaving for England, but the exact time and location of this visit are unknown. It is unlikely he would have been granted a long enough leave of absence to return to Colorado after joining up with 22nd, so the visit would have most likely followed his basic training in Texas.¹²

Actions in Europe

In early January 1944, the 22nd Infantry once again headed to New Jersey to prepare for their departure. Louie and the rest of his regiment left for England on January

⁹ History of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, January 8, 1944.

¹⁰ Belis, Michael, email correspondence with Cassie Moore, March 10-17, 2019.

¹¹ Obituary of Louie Hernandez, *Greeley Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1944.

¹² Babcock, Robert interview with Cassie Moore, May 24, 2019.

18, 1944 on *His Majesty's Transport Capetown Castle*.¹³ The 4th Infantry Division arrived in Liverpool, England on January 29th and headed south to the Devon coast where they would spend the following four months training for the invasion of Normandy. Louie and the 1st Battalion were “somewhat inadequately quartered in ancient and forbidding buildings in Newton-Abbott.”¹⁴ The officers were informed that the 4th Division was the first division chosen to storm the beaches of Normandy and training for what they now knew was inevitable began. On February 5, 1944, the men were honored with a visit from several important generals, including Eisenhower and Bradley.¹⁵ Chaplain Bill Boice described the period as follows, “Training in squad problems, the handling of weapons, camouflage, use of artillery and mortars, assault tactics, pole charges, bee-hives, and the bazooka were given to the men, squad by squad, until they became thoroughly familiar with their particular job. Certain tactics were taught, then Company, Battalion, Regimental, and Division problems involving these same tactics were run, in order to familiarize the troops with their practical application. Weak spots within the organization were discovered and removed. Officers were shifted in their command. Day by day, the tension increased as it became evident that the long-promised second front would soon be a reality.”¹⁶

¹³ History of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division to The Commanding General, 4th Infantry Division, March 4, 1944.

¹⁴ Boice, William F. *History of the Twenty-Second United States Infantry in World War II*. 1959, 4.

¹⁵ History of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, March 4, 1944, WWII Operations Reports, 1940-48.

¹⁶ Boice, William F. *History of the Twenty-Second*, 1959, 4.

Louie and the 22nd did their most intensive preparation in Slapton Sands, located along the south Devon coast of England, between March and April of 1944. Here the beach closely resembled Utah Beach, where the 4th would land, and obstacles were set up to resemble what troops would encounter on D-Day. “Here landing rehearsals, complete with naval fire support and German E-boat opposition, were held many times.”¹⁷ Through March of 1944, the 4th endured rigorous training through wet, freezing weather along the coast and completed their first landing practice, Exercise Beaver, on March 25th.¹⁸ On April 27-28, 1944, Operation Tiger, which was planned to be the most realistic practice exercise prior to the invasion, an unforeseen tragedy occurred.¹⁹ In the midst of the exercise, at 0130 hours, German E-boats off of the Devon coast managed to intercept Allied radio transmissions and consequently discovered Operation Tiger. The E-boats opened fire on the LSTs. By the time the sun rose, 749 members of the army, the bulk of whom were from the 4th Division - the 22nd Regiment in particular, and 197 naval service-members had been killed.²⁰ The tragedy of Operation Tiger would remain an Allied secret for many years after the war, but those who lost their lives would ultimately be honored 50 years later in 1994. On May 15th, the men of the 4th Infantry Division were moved to fenced enclosures to ensure that the final preparations for the invasion would be maintained in utmost secrecy.²¹ At this point, Louie and his fellow

¹⁷ United States. Army. Infantry Division, 4th. *Yearbook*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Army & Navy Pub. Co, 1946).

¹⁸ History of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division to The Commanding General, 4th Infantry Division, April 9, 1944.

¹⁹ History of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division to The Commanding General, 4th Infantry Division, May 3, 1944.

²⁰ Babcock, Robert interview with Cassie Moore, May 24, 2019.

²¹ Babcock, Robert interview with Cassie Moore, May 24, 2019.

soldiers began to study photos, maps, and sand tables as they awaited the day they had spent years preparing for.

As a member of Dog Company, a heavy weapons company, Louie was either part of the machine gun or mortar crew charged with protecting the front lines. As a member of the machine gun crew, Louie would have worked with a .30 caliber gun on a three man team. The team would have included a gunner, assistant gunner, and ammo bearer. This three-person team would have worked as part of the front line in order to suppress enemy fire and keep the German's heads down to minimize the assault on their own front lines. As a mortarman, Louie would have worked with portable 81 mm mortars, also on a three man team, and would have been positioned just behind the front lines. These mortars were often the most valuable asset for the infantry due to the amount of firepower they added to the attack.²² While the specifics of his position within the company are unknown, in either situation Louie and his fellow crew members would have been a major target for the Germans. It was also common for members of Dog Company to be assigned to one of the Able, Baker, or Charlie Companies on any given day.²³ It is likely that Louie was assigned to one of these three rifle companies to provide either machine gun or mortar support where it was most needed during the invasion.

On the morning of June 6, 1944 the 4th Infantry Division was charged with landing and securing Utah Beach and ultimately the Cotentin Peninsula and the important port city of Cherbourg. Martin King, who was in a similar company to Louie, landed around 0550 hours to set up machine gun defense for the incoming waves. He described

²² Babcock, Robert interview with Cassie Moore, May 24, 2019.

²³ Babcock, Robert interview with Cassie Moore, May 24, 2019.

his experience as follows, “We dug in two machine guns and fell in behind a sand dune. If you have ever prayed with your eyes wide open while scanning the horizon, you can imagine what this was like. We waited and waited. The time was getting closer to H-Hour, 0630 hours. It seemed like an eternity because no wave of our troops came in behind us.”²⁴ The first wave, including the 3rd Battalion of the 22nd, landed at 0630 hours. Louie, along with the 1st Battalion of the 22nd, landed in the second group at 1000 hours.²⁵ “The First and Second Battalions landed in LCIs, crossed the beach and inundated areas, with the mission of attacking to the northwest, reducing the strongpoints at Crisbecq and Azeville, and then securing the high ground west and southwest of Quineville”²⁶ Despite the strategic error due to faulty intelligence that resulted in the Utah landings two miles south of their initial objective, by nightfall, the beach was securely in the hands of Allied forces.

On June 7, Louie and the First Battalion moved toward the German stronghold at Crisbecq through Ravenoville and St. Marcouf. They endured a counterattack that afternoon that drove them back about 800 yards.²⁷ It was on this day, in either the initial push toward Crisbecq or the counterattack that afternoon, that Louie was first wounded in battle and removed from the front lines for several days to receive medical care. The First Battalion endured yet another counterattack that night at 0040 that they were able to hold off without any further casualties. June 8th and 9th were spent continuing the

²⁴ Babcock, Robert O. *War Stories: Volume 1: D-Day to the Liberation of Paris*. (Atlanta, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2014), 10.

²⁵ Utah Beach Landing Diagram, May 13, 1944.

²⁶ United States. Army. Infantry Division, 4th. *After Action Report: 22nd Infantry Regiment*, June 6-26, 1944, 1.

²⁷ *After Action Report: 22nd Infantry Regiment*, June 6-26, 1944, 1.

unsuccessful push to take Crisbecq. Louie rejoined the 22nd on June 10th as the First Battalion attacked Fontanay Sur Mer, living up to his regimental motto of “Deeds, not words”. The attack on Fontenay Sur Mer was in an effort to relieve some of the pressure on the Third Battalion as they attempted to take Ozoville.²⁸ These efforts continued for several days until June 13th when the Third Battalion was able to secure Ozoville. On the evening of June 13th, Louie and the First Battalion moved into a position left of the Third Battalion to prepare for a coordinated attack on Quineville.

On June 14, 1944 all three battalions of the 22nd Infantry were directed to attack and secure Quineville Ridge and two hills to the east in preparation for taking the town. The 1st Battalion was to work to secure the fortified eastern nose of the ridge and the first hill to the east, with the support of the 70th Tank Battalion. Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion was to seize the crest and the 3rd Battalion the easternmost hill, both supported by the 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion.²⁹ These initial attacks were successful and the 22nd was able to secure the high ground west of Quineville by 2130. This victory was essential for protecting the continued unloading at Utah Beach and worked to overcome the German’s best natural defenses in the area.³⁰

It was in the battle for Quineville Ridge that Louie lost his life. Private First Class Louie Hernandez was killed in action on June 14, 1944 and was awarded the Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster for his service. This medal represented both his injury from June 7th and the wound on June 14th that resulted in his untimely death. Private Bob

²⁸ *After Action Report: 22nd Infantry Regiment*, June 6-26, 1944, 1.

²⁹ *After Action Report: 22nd Infantry Regiment*, June 6-26, 1944, 2.

³⁰ *After Action Report: 22nd Infantry Regiment*, June 6-26, 1944, 2.

Sales said, “D-Day was the longest day, there’s not doubt about that, but for those who survived, it was just one day...The average infantryman survived a week, if he was lucky.”³¹ Louie’s experience was very closely aligned with this average. At the time of his death, Louie was only 25 years old.

Role of the 22nd through VE Day

As the war in Europe raged on for nearly a year after Louie’s death, the 22nd Infantry Regiment would continue to be deeply involved in the fight. After securing Quineville Ridge, the men of the 22nd were given their first break since D-Day. On June 18, they took the opportunity to bathe and shave before their brief vacation ended and the push for Cherbourg resumed on June 19. Cherbourg was liberated on June 27 and “officers and men alike looked forward hopefully to a period of rest and retraining, for the operations against the fortifications and hedgerows of the Cherbourg Peninsula had cost dearly in men and material.”³² On July 7, the 22nd began the Carenten-Periers Operation, notoriously known as “The Battle of the Hedgerows,” which would go on to become one of the deadliest and most difficult encounters of the entire war. The 22nd would continue to be critical to the push towards Paris in the weeks that followed. “During the morning of August 27th the 22nd Infantry entered the capital city, and upon the troops were heaped the plaudits and gratitude of the now laughing, now crying, flag waving, kissing, hugging, wine dispensing, champagne drinking, hysterical populace.”³³

³¹ Kershaw, Alex. *The Bedford Boys: One American Town’s Ultimate D-Day Sacrifice*. (USA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 179.

³² 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry. “22nd Infantry Regiment History World War II.” 1-22infantry.org.

³³ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

The push through France towards Belgium and, ultimately Germany, continued and on September 11, 1944 the front lines of the 22nd Infantry Regiment entered Germany for the first time.³⁴ On September 14, the 22nd began their attack on one of the most well-fortified German defenses - the Siegfried Line. By early October, despite massive casualties and refortification by the enemy, “beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt the 22nd Infantry had proved that the Siegfried Line was capable of being penetrated.”³⁵ The 22nd would spend the remainder of October and early November in Belgium defending their progress.

In mid-November the 22nd began an offensive towards Germany through dense forest and increasingly difficult weather. In the months that followed, the 22nd would be in near constant combat with a strong and stubborn enemy. “To appreciate the action of the regiment during these initial phases of the Ardennes Offensive, it must be borne in mind that these defensive operations were carried out with strengths depleted to the point where it became necessary to use every man available as a rifleman, which at times brought cooks, clerks, and drivers to the front.”³⁶ Despite some forward progress through January, much of February was spent consolidating their position in the face of regular assault by German forces. They resumed the offensive on February 28 near the Prum River and after a couple weeks of forward progress and intense opposition, the men of the 22nd were granted one of their first true reprieves of the war.³⁷ The regiment was sent to

³⁴ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

³⁵ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

³⁶ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

³⁷ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

Luneville, France from March 14 to March 29 to recuperate and prepare for the final push of the European theater.

On March 30, 1945, the 22nd crossed the Rhine and began their offensive toward the now imminent German surrender. The 22nd Infantry Regiment Yearbook describes the movement through Germany as follows:

“At various points throughout the advance the German resistance stiffened, and vicious local fighting ensued, requiring troops to dismount and go into the attack in the normal role of infantry; at other times the attack surged forward against little or no opposition. ...The death rattle of the once famous Wehrmacht could be heard on all sides. Radios came to be relied upon exclusively; to lay wire was impossible. Five, ten, fifteen miles a day, the attack surged and eddied like a storm-swollen river that has broken its banks; death and destruction lay everywhere in the wake of the Allied effort. The once arrogant had been reduced to the pitiful; and from early morning to late at night the attack continued, town after town falling to the 22nd.”³⁸

After Germany’s surrender on May 8, 1945, the 22nd would spend several months helping to guard military areas and process displaced persons and prisoners-of-war until they were officially discharged on August 28, 1945 following the surrender of Japan. Ultimately, the 4th Division would be so continuously involved in the struggle to liberate the continent that they would see more casualties in the European theatre than any other unit. “From D-Day in Normandy to V-E Day in Germany, 1,653 officers and enlisted

³⁸ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

men of the 22nd Infantry had been killed in action, and 6,053 had been wounded, a total of 7,706 battle casualties.”³⁹ In every way, Louie and the men of the 22nd truly exemplified their regimental motto - “Deeds, Not Words.” As said by Historian Bob Babcock, “No other American division suffered more casualties in the European theater than did the 4ID, and no other division accomplished as much”.

Louie’s Final Resting Place

Antonia and Marianna Hernandez were informed in July 1944 that their son, Louie, had been killed in action on June 14, 1944. On August 23rd, Marianna wrote the Army Effects Bureau in hopes of securing her son’s belongings.⁴⁰ At the time of his death, Louie was listed as having only a Social Security card, two ribbons, razor blades, a billfold with photos and receipts (no money), and bracelet on his person. The Army Effects Bureau replied on October 6th that they had not yet received his belongings, but provided Marianna with information that would help to expedite the delivery upon their receipt.⁴¹ Army documents noted that the typical delivery of effects from the European theater of the war was 6 months. Louie’s parents received notification on November 30th that Louie’s belongings were on their way.⁴² On December 17th Antonio wrote, “Dear Sir, Just a few lines to let you know that we receive our son’s billfold with some pictures in it but we did not receive his wrist watch. We sure hope that you would try and look for it if its possible because his watch was a gift from his mother and family. I am sorry to

³⁹ 1st Battalion 22nd Infantry, History WWII, 1-22infantry.org.

⁴⁰ Marianna Hernandez, Letter to Army Effects Bureau, August 23, 1944.

⁴¹ A.F. Timms, Letter from Army Effects Bureau to Marianna Hernandez, October 6, 1944.

⁴² A.F. Timms, Letter from Army Effects Bureau to Marianna Hernandez, November 30, 1944.

ask for all this trouble.”⁴³ In early 1945, the Army Bureau did order an inquiry into the whereabouts of Louie’s watch. Unfortunately, Louie’s watch was never returned to his family.

Following his death, Louie was temporarily buried in the U.S. Military Cemetery in St. Mere Eglise (#2) southeast of Cherbourg. In August 1946, the military reached out to Antonio and Marianna to determine their wishes for Louie’s final internment.⁴⁴ They responded in a handwritten note, “We want to express that we are very thankful from here about where our loved one was buried in that letter we read. Well for our part its better for his grave to remain over there. Sorry that we have answer this so late the letter we receive was missent and we did not receive it soon. So we are very thankful.”⁴⁵ On May 25, 1949, the Quartermaster General wrote, “The remains of your loved one have been permanently interned...side by side with comrades who also gave their lives for their country...You may rest assured that this final internment was conducted with fitting dignity and solemnity and that the grave-site will be carefully and conscientiously maintained in perpetuity by the United States Government.”⁴⁶ Louie Hernandez, a man who sacrificed all for his country, was laid to rest in the American St. Laurent Military Cemetery, known today as the Normandy American Cemetery.

⁴³ Antonio Hernandez, Handwritten letter to Army Effects Bureau, December 17, 1944

⁴⁴ T.B. Larkin, Letter from the Quartermaster General to Antonio Hernandez, August 6, 1946

⁴⁵ Antonio Hernandez, Handwritten letter to the War Department, September 4, 1946

⁴⁶ H. Feldman, Letter from the Quartermaster General to Antonio Hernandez, May 25, 1949

Final Resting Place:

Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial

Colleville-sur-Mer

Departement du Calvados

Basse-Normandie, France

Plot: Plot F Row 18 Grave 40

Acknowledgements

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