

**Private Sidney I. Heistein**  
**Serial: 32568247**  
**3rd Infantry Division**  
**15th Infantry Regiment**  
**1st Battalion**  
**B Company**  
**Killed In Action 18 October 1943.**

References

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6. To Hell And Back, Audie L. Murphy, 1949, Henry Holt and Co.
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Note: Known facts are keyed to the references above. *Surmised information is written in italics.*

I

Sidney Heistein was born on 6 February 1909 (2) and was drafted on 24 October 1942 entering at Chester, NJ. (1) *Based on the record of Audie Murphy, who also served in B Company, it is likely that Sidney Heistein joined the 15th Infantry Regiment in North Africa in the late Winter of 1943. The likely location was Port Lyautey, Morocco.* On 15 March, the company was moved to the invasion training center at Arzew, near Oran to train for the invasion of Sicily. (4) At Arzew, the regiment began intensive training for amphibious landings, advanced infantry techniques and introduction to mines and booby traps used by the Germans and Italians.

Of note was the intense physical training of the Third Infantry Division which was the key to their superior performance against the German Army throughout the war. Division Commander, MG Lucien K. Truscott, believed that the American Infantryman should be trained to the level of the Roman Legions, or at least that of the Civil War armies. He instituted an intense physical training program that included the "Truscott

Trot” which conditioned the men to high speed, long distance marches. Each man was required to march one hour at 5 MPH, 4 MPH for the next 2 hours and then 3.5 MPH for the remainder of a thirty-mile march. A live-fire military exercise was held at the conclusion of the march. An esprit de corps developed amongst the infantry units of the 3rd Division and unlike many other units, each man challenged and assisted his fellow soldier to meet the standard. Although cursed by the soldiers, the training served them well over the challenging terrain that would be encountered in the coming Sicilian and Italian campaigns. (4, 6, 7) Company B in particular, was trained to pass the assault battalions and seize inland objectives. On 7 July 1943, the company arrived at it's embarkation point at Karouba Naval Base, near Bizerte, Tunisia for the invasion of Sicily. (4)

## II

A letter written by Sidney to my father Philip Sturm, confirms Sidney Heistein's participation in the Sicilian Campaign. (11, see letter 3) The record of the Regiment's service in the Sicilian campaign, July-August, 1943 can be found in the above references. Briefly, the company landed at Licata, Sicily on 10 July, moved northwest against the Hermann Goering Division, through the backbone of Sicily via Agrigento, Corleone to Palermo. (In the movie “Patton” this action was dubbed a “Reconnaissance in Force” against Agrigento.”) They then fought east along the Northern Sicily coast, participating in the bloody engagement at the San Fratello Ridge on 4-7 August and entered Messina exhausted but victorious on 17 August. The company was moved back to Palermo in late August and embarked for Italy on 20 Sept. *It is likely that Sidney wrote the letter to my father in Palermo in early September, 1943.* Sidney Heistein's participation in the battles of the Sicilian Campaign will be subject of further research at a later date and this section will be expanded.

## III

Bloodied by the North African and Sicilian campaigns, the Third Division was held in reserve for the main Italian landings - more due to a lack of transport vessels than a desire to rest the division. The main landings on the Italian Peninsula were made by the 45th and 36th Infantry Divisions on 9 September 1943 at Salerno, south of Naples. Sidney's Regiment landed on 21 September near Battipaglia and immediately contacted the enemy, coming under machine gun fire. (4) After moving on Acerno, regiment moved through the Sabato Valley to Cervano. After a brief rest at a reserve area at Volturara, the first battalion rejoined the division for the assault on Avellino where Sidney Heistein was later buried. The 3rd ID was then assigned to effect a crossing of the Volturno River, with the strategic objective of Dragoni.

B Company arrived at the Volturno on 6 October and remained in their positions on the

northern slope of Mt. Tifata opposite Triflisco until 14 October, all the while under constant machine gun, mortar and artillery fire and so close to the enemy that the soldiers on both sides traded curses. (6)

Battle conditions during the Italian Fall were miserable with constant cold and rain. The men lived and fought in mud up to their knees. (7) They were constantly wet, cold and without adequate winter clothing. (4). It was impossible to make fires for fear of giving away their position. Cold field rations, scarce fresh water and no sanitary facilities were the norm. Foxholes were often shared with the corpses of American or German casualties again for fear of unnecessary movement betraying a position. (6)

On 13 October, 1943, B Company, 15 INF was ordered to feign a crossing of the Volturno from their positions at the western flank of the Division area in order to draw enemy fire away from the 7th regiment who would effect the actual crossing in the central sector. The men opened up with machine guns, small arms and mortars and immediately hunkered down for the ensuing enemy shelling. German artillery was extremely accurate because their gunners were experienced, well-trained and very familiar with the terrain, having garrisoned it for some time. The German 88mm cannon was the finest of the war. It was multi-use, equally effective as an anti-aircraft gun, direct-fire anti-tank weapon or as an indirect-fire field artillery piece. When the enemy realized that the 7th was actually crossing the river, they shifted their fire away from the 15th. B Co, 1st BN, 15 INF was then held in reserve on the south bank of the Volturno while the rest of the division crossed and drove the enemy northward. (4)

The 1st BN crossed the Volturno on 14 October and operated on the heights above Triflisco. They moved northeast arriving at Villa on the 16th, swinging northwest to Hill 446 above Roccaromana by nightfall of 17 October. Hill 446 offered a splendid view of enemy artillery positions however the enemy manning those positions had the same view of the advancing American troops and directed their artillery fire effectively. In the morning of 18 October, B Company moved over the hill to attack Roccaromana, winding up in positions north of the town. Roccaromana was taken and lost twice by Company A before finally falling on the 19th. B Company Morning Reports indicate 9 soldiers killed in action due to enemy artillery fire on 18 October 1943 (3) most from a single squad. (4) Listed amongst those casualties is Pvt. Sidney I. Heistein. (3)

#### IV

Actual movements of Company B, 15th Infantry from 1 October 1943 to 18 October 1943 (3):

1 October Volturara to Monteforte  
2 October Monteforte to Mognano

3 October Mognano to Purgatorio to Cicciano (contacted Enemy)  
..  
5 October Cicciano to Cannello  
6 October Cannello to Touro to San Leucio  
..  
9 October Lan Leucio to positions on a hill north of San Maria (N. Slope of Mt. Tifata)  
..  
14 October Crossed Volturno, to Bellona  
..  
16 October Bellona to Pontelatone  
17 October Pontelatone to Troglia to Villa  
18 October Hill 446 above Roccaromana

An error in the 18 October Morning report puts the company at Majorano di Monte on the 18th. This explains why the Report of Interment lists Sidney as being killed at Majorano. The 18 October Morning Report was probably mixed up with those of the 3rd BN, 15 INF who were actually operating at Majorano on that date.

An additional note, the Morning Reports make frequent note of Sidney's commanding officer, Captain Keith L. Ware. Capt. Ware went on to win the Medal of Honor in WWII, eventually becoming the commander of the First Infantry Division during Vietnam. Major General Keith L. Ware's helicopter was shot down in 1968 during the Tet Offensive. He was the highest ranking officer killed in action during Vietnam.

V

Sidney Heistein died of multiple shell fragment wounds to the entire front of his body. (2) *The nature of the wounds indicate he was standing and the shell burst in front of him. This can only happen to an experienced infantryman when caught by surprise by the first shells of a barrage.*

*Although doubt always exists as to the identity of those killed in action, the family can take comfort in the knowledge that the body was found intact, the dog tags were present, no doubt exists in official reports as to his identity and the documentation of the chain of custody of the remains has no gaps from burial in Italy to interment in Mount Freedom. It is my belief that all evidence confirms that the body returned to the Heistein family is indeed that of Sidney I. Heistein.*

Sidney Heistein was buried on 23 October 1943 at 4:45PM in the American Military Cemetery at Avellino, Italy, Plot B, Row 12, Grave 133, the grave marked with a white painted, wooden Star of David. One identification tag was buried with his body, the other attached to the grave marker. His grave was the first in the row, next to him was

buried PFC William J. Walsh of Headquarters Company, 15 INF. (2) The cemetery no longer exists, all remaining bodies were transferred to the Military Cemetery at Nettuno, Italy near Anzio. Period photos show simple rows of white crosses, with an occasional Star of David interspersed. In the center of the cemetery stood a flagstaff flying the American Flag.

Personal Effects found and returned to the family:

180 Lira cash (1.80 USD)

1 Eversharp Mechanical Pencil

1 Wallet

2 Souvenir Coins

Papers

4 Money Order Receipts

The burial report indicates a ring, however the property inventories do not list this.

Finance records indicate he was owed \$88.50 in back pay.

The Individual Deceased Personnel File describes a long series of correspondence between Sidney's sister Gloria Bernstein and the Dept of the Army. She tries desperately to protect her parents from further shock and grief by asking the Army to direct all further correspondence regarding disposition of remains and return of personal effects to her. Due to a labyrinth of military regulations, 4 years passed until Gloria obtained the necessary authorization to make final arrangements to return the body to the United States in late 1947. Sidney Heistein's father, Joseph Heistein passed away on 13 August 1947, his death no doubt hastened by the loss of his son.

The body was exhumed on 27 July 1948, transferred to Naples and then to the morgue in the port of Leghorn, Italy 18 April 1949. Sidney Heistein's remains embarked for the United States, ironically, on 18 October 1949 along with the remains of over 8,000 other servicemen aboard the US Transport Lawrence Victory, a specially fitted morgue ship. The body arrived in Brooklyn, NY on 31 October 1949 and was transferred to the morgue at the NY Port Of Embarkation, *possibly at Brooklyn Army Terminal*. Upon notification of the arrival of the remains in the U.S., Gloria Bernstein made a request, agreed to by the Army, to have the body held for delivery until the winter of 1950, giving her the necessary time to bring her mother Rose Heistein, now in very poor health, to her home in Florida. Gloria's brother Jack Heistein attended to the funeral and burial in New Jersey. Rose remained in Florida until after the funeral. The body was under escort at all times from disinterment in Avellino to delivery at the Lanterman Funeral Home, Morristown, NJ on 22 January 1950. Sidney Heistein's grave sits in a place of honor in the center of the Mount Freedom Jewish Center Cemetery. Nearby, Heistein Park, originally owned and developed by his brother Jack, is named in his honor.

## VI

The silver and blue Combat Infantryman's Badge that adorned Sidney Heistein's uniform garners the highest respect amongst a soldier's peers, particularly when it sits atop the Purple Heart which is awarded to all who shed blood for their country. Although official records do not show any medals for valor, no mere decoration can convey the debt all living Jews owe to Sidney I. Heistein and those of his honored generation who fought, bled and died in the war against the Nazis. Even a cursory reading of the Nazi documents concerning the Final Solution indicate that had the Nazis won the Second World War, not a single American Jew nor any of those peoples considered "racially inferior" would have survived.

I owe my life to Sidney Heistein and I will never forget his sacrifice. The Hebrew anniversary of Sidney Heistein's death occurs during the Jewish Holiday of Tabernacles. Each year on that date, a candle burns in our home, its flame symbolizing the soul of this American Hero and Martyr of Israel. A number of relatives have told me that Sidney Heistein was a gentle man who would sidestep to avoid stepping on an insect. It is almost unfathomable that such a man could have fought and died in the most vicious conflict in human history. This document is my personal prayer that the memory of Sidney I. Heistein be remembered eternally and honored by successive generations of our family.

Michael B. Sturm  
Memorial Day, 2012