

# Grant Stephen Deahl

U.S. Army, Technical Sergeant

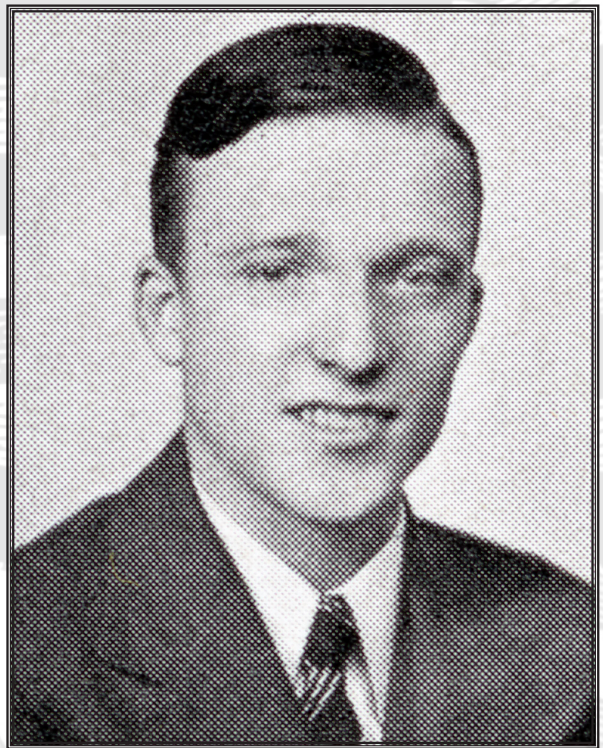
1923 - 2013

Written by Jacob Klinger,  
West Virginia University

Grant Stephen Deahl Sr. was born November 9, 1923, in Masontown, West Virginia, to George Warren Deahl and Lillian Deahl, nee Hartman. The family resided in the small coal mining and railroad community of Bretz, West Virginia, located just outside of Masontown. Alongside his older brother Virgil, Deahl grew up exploring Bretz and hitching rides on the Morgantown & Kingwood Railroad where he helped fire the locomotive's engine. Despite its size, Bretz boasted an amateur league baseball club known as the Austin Powder Team. Composed of local miners, the Austin Powders were a source of entertainment for local residents. Deahl may have traveled the rails to games against neighboring opponents such as Morgantown's Christopher Coal Club.

During the 1930s, the Great Depression took hold of Bretz resulting in unemployment and hardships for much of the community. Intermittent layoffs at the local Richard Coal Mine affected many including Deahl's father, a World War I veteran whose treatment for his service-related illness already took him away from both work and family. Deahl's mother handled much of the household affairs and managed to raise the children despite facing financial and sustenance challenges.

In spring 1941, Deahl graduated from Valley High School in Masontown. That same year, he enrolled in West Virginia University's (WVU) fall semester. Deahl lived with his parents in Bretz, 14 miles away from Morgantown, and carpooled with a neighbor to school. At the end of his first semester, the Pearl Harbor attack occurred and the United States began preparing for war. Deahl enthusiastically volunteered for the Army Air Corps, inspired by the exploits of World War I ace Eddie Rickenbacker. However, poor eyesight and bad physical tests disqualified him from active duty. Intent on serving, Deahl volunteered for WVU's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) where he served for the next year in Company F. On October 16, 1943, the Army upgraded his status from reservist to active duty and sent him a draft notice. Within a month, he departed West Virginia for basic training in Louisiana.

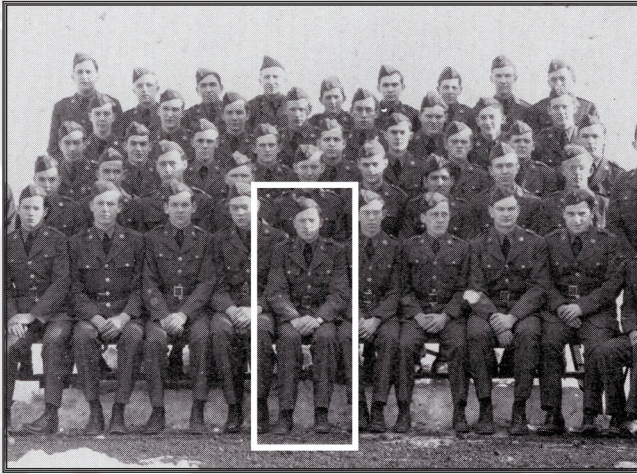


**Grant Stephen Deahl's senior portrait in the 1942 West Virginia University yearbook, about a year before he was drafted. WVU Libraries**

Deahl completed his training and soon shipped to Great Britain to assist with supply distribution. After initially serving around Pheasey Farms, England, as a truck driver in the Transportation Corps, he transferred



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**Deahl (marked in center) and his Reserve Officer Training Corps company at West Virginia University in 1942-43.**  
*WVU Libraries*

to Glasgow, Scotland, where he joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Major Port—a unit charged with establishing and operating oceanic supply ports for Allied forces. By August 9, 1944, Deahl and his unit departed Glasgow and made their way to Normandy, France, following the D-Day invasion.

Throughout the rest of summer 1944, the 5<sup>th</sup> Major Port moved along the French coast unloading supplies at Omaha Beach, Cherbourg, Saint Michel, and Morlaix to help keep General Patton's Third Army supplied as it advanced through France. Deahl served a vital job in the Allied logistics chain. After receiving and unloading war material from cargo vessels, known as Liberty Ships, Deahl's unit transferred the freight to the Army's Motor Transport Division which trucked

the supplies day and night along a one-way, looped route to depots behind the frontlines. This convoy system became known as the "Red Ball Express," railroad slang for express freight, and succeeded in transporting some 412,193 tons of war material to the frontlines while it operated.

By the end of November, Deahl and the 5<sup>th</sup> Major Port arrived in Antwerp, Belgium, to operate the recently captured port facilities. The work was particularly dangerous as V-1 and V-2 rockets, known as vengeance weapons, targeted the port and city to disrupt the Allied supply chain. In lieu of an effective air force, the Germans developed these pilotless rockets to bombard targets—frequently large cities which they could hit with relative ease. Deahl claimed to witness a few of these attacks including the December 16, 1944, strike on Antwerp's Cinema Rex which ranks as the city's deadliest. In total, around 150 rockets hit Antwerp's port facilities, claiming the lives of 53 workers and causing the Allies to redirect ammunition shipments to Ghent, Belgium.



**A dockside view of the first Allied Liberty ship to unload in the Belgian port of Antwerp, where Deahl and the 5th Major Port endured German rocket attacks.** *Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, © IWM A 26563*

On the same day the rocket struck the Cinema Rex, the Battle of the Bulge erupted about a hundred miles southeast of Antwerp in the Ardennes Forest. To achieve a tactical edge, German commandos disguised in American or British uniforms, infiltrated Allied lines to seize key bridges and disrupt the

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flow of reinforcements and supplies. In response, Allied commanders organized rear echelon men like Deahl into infantry units to man guard posts and patrol key road junctions around the city. However, the German advance did not reach Antwerp so Deahl did not see any fighting. Following the battle, Deahl continued working with the 5<sup>th</sup> Major Port until the unit merged into the 13<sup>th</sup> Major Port on November 18, 1945. For the next few months, Deahl worked as a longshoreman in Antwerp until he returned to the U.S. The Army honorably discharged him in 1946.

Upon his return, Deahl served as a civilian instructor for the Army at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, located just outside of Baltimore, Maryland. Aberdeen Proving Ground primarily served as a research and testing site for new military equipment and tactics. During the time Deahl was there, the Army had a Special Vehicle Operation Section which hosted instructors teaching convoy operations. Given Deahl's military experiences as a truck driver and longshoreman, the Army may have offered him a teaching position in this department. Deahl remained in Aberdeen before returning to WVU to complete his undergraduate studies. By 1951, he obtained his master's degree in education and taught at Everettville School in Morgantown, West Virginia. He then went on to briefly work as an engineer for Ford Motor Company in Michigan before returning to Morgantown to work as a draftsman for the Sterling Faucet Company.

On August 14, 1956, Deahl married Violet Maxine Deahl, nee Taylor, and together they had two sons: Steve and Marty. By this time, Deahl was working as a schoolteacher for the Monongalia County School System (West Virginia), where he instructed shop classes. In 1960, Deahl left the school system to work at Christopher Coal Company's Humphrey No. 7 Mine, located north of Morgantown in the small community of Maidsville. For the next 29 years, Deahl worked in the company shop repairing mining cars until he retired in 1989.

Grant Stephen Deahl passed away January 13, 2013, at the age of 89. He is buried alongside his wife in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



**Unloading vehicles from a vessel in Antwerp. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, © IWM A 26601**



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## Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery  
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354  
(304) 265-2044

Section 7  
Site 536

Date of interment: January 17, 2013

## About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's first National Cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. Since the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

**Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council**  
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