

# STANLEY JOHN PAHUT

SERGEANT  
U.S. ARMY

WORLD WAR II  
1914 - 1943

WRITTEN BY OWEN ESTEL AND ALEX FURBEE  
UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL  
INSTRUCTED BY MEGHAN DUNN

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On July 10, 1914, Stanley John Pahut was born in St. Johnsville, New York. His parents Caroline and John Pahut, both born in Poland, immigrated to the United States in 1910 and 1912, respectively. Polish immigration to the United States increased dramatically at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. A shortage of jobs and land caused native Poles to flee their homeland, most of which was then part of Czarist Russia. John and Caroline were fortunate to have emigrated just a few years before World War I, when the war's Eastern Front would ravage their Polish homeland.

By the 1910 census, it was calculated that 900,000 Polish-speaking people lived in the United States. Caroline stayed at home to take care of the family, while John worked as a millwright in steel mills.

Stanley was the eldest child. A brother, Paul, was born in 1919 and would later serve in the Navy during World War II. Four sisters followed: Adele (1920), Joan (1924), Helen (1927), and Mary (1932).

Stanley and his family moved to Youngstown, Ohio, sometime before he entered high school. They joined a large number of Eastern European immigrants pursuing employment in the steel industry. His father John found work as a millwright at Republic Iron and Steel Company, which had moved its headquarters to Youngstown from Pittsburgh in 1911 (it consolidated with several other companies to form Republic Steel in 1930). Millwrights at Republic were paid a competitive wage—according to the 1930 and 1940 census. The Pahuts owned the house they lived in on East Myrtle Street. Stanley attended South High School in 1928 and 1929 but appears to have cut his education short when the Great Depression descended on the global economy.

Like most American cities in 1929, Youngstown's growth crashed to a halt as the Great Depression knocked the bottom out of American businesses. Youngstown's reliance on the steel industry generated an unemployment rate

three times the national average, as the national demand for steel in cars, factories, and construction projects evaporated. Stanley dropped out of high school to provide for his family, picking up work as a general laborer at Republic Steel. Steel workers faced 12 hours of grueling and exhausting work in dirty, smoky, and dark buildings with a high risk of occupational injury. By the 1940 census, Stanley reported that he worked 46 weeks in 1939 while his father worked only 20, possibly an indication that his father had lost his job or was incapacitated for a time. Perhaps the work was growing too strenuous for John (who turned 50 in 1940) or Republic had reduced shifts, though by the late 1930s heavy industry was in recovery as the United States embarked on a massive military rearmament program. Stanley's younger sister Adele also picked up work to support the family in 1939.

In 1940, as World War II slowly encroached on American neutrality, a mandatory draft was enacted for fighting-age men. Stanley registered as required in October that year and had little time to wait for a change in circumstances: he was officially called into military service on February 28, 1941, nine months before the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. He was 26 years old.

After basic training, Stanley Pahut was assigned to the 168th Infantry Regiment, 34th Infantry Division, which he joined at the lowly rank of private. The 34th shipped to Northern Ireland in January 1942 for further training in anticipation of fighting in the European theater. For many in the division, this was the first time they had ever been overseas or in a new country. Because of this inexperience, the U.S. military issued a Pocket Guide to Northern Ireland to familiarize the soldiers with the country, weather, dress, customs, and culture. The pamphlet especially urged American soldiers to avoid debating religion or politics with locals because those types of arguments were a "Scotch-Irish specialty."

Most of Stanley's training in Ireland consisted of physical drills, obstacle courses, and weapon familiarization. Owing to the relatively small areas in which they were billeted, however, there was no way to practice large-scale unit movements—an essential component of invasion preparation. The division's equipment was also badly outdated, including First World War Springfield rifles and "dishpan" helmets like those of the doughboys a generation before. Despite supply shortages, the 168th did receive some specialized training in July 1942 when they moved to Scotland to work with British commandos. They practiced amphibious assaults near Loch Fyne and Strachan Beach.

Following training in Northern Ireland and Scotland, Stanley Pahut and the 168th received orders to participate in Operation Torch—the invasion of

North Africa. While not seen as the most crucial theater of war, ejecting German and Italian troops from North Africa would provide valuable combat experience for American troops, and secure supply lines across the Mediterranean. It was to be the first mass involvement of U.S. troops in World War II, working with British forces to square off against roughly 100,000 Axis troops.

Initial amphibious landings for Operation Torch took place from November 8 to November 16, 1942, with the Americans wading ashore near Casablanca. Supported by over 400 warships, 1,000 planes, and with a full complement of 107,000 men, progress inland was rapid. The beach landings were messy, however. Several units of the 168th landed in the wrong areas and were widely spread out, making communication and supply a logistical nightmare. Nevertheless, they pushed forward and seized important road networks around Algiers, even capturing an important airfield at Blide. The Allies raced to the borders of Tunisia, pouring in reinforcements but quickly running into supply problems in the wide, harsh desert. The Americans and British were forced to pause and regroup, while Axis reinforcements were similarly rushed into Tunisia in preparation for a counterattack.

The 168th, paired for a time with the 1st Armored Division, was tasked with taking the Tunisian junction town of Sened Station at the end of January. It was the regiment's first true battle against veteran German troops. Long marches moved them into position on the night of February 1, though they were attacked by ME-109 fighters and Stuka dive bombers throughout the day. The assault on Sened Station was strongly resisted by dug-in Axis infantry, artillery, and tanks in an all-day battle that saw the 168th repulsed. Pahut's battalion commander and executive officer were wounded (the former would later die of his wounds). Undaunted, the 168th regrouped and took the town, along with 152 German and Italian prisoners.

By mid-February 1943, Stanley Pahut and the 168th, boosted by some additional units to the strength of a Regimental Combat Team (RCT), held high ground near Faid Pass. This crucial crossroads stood squarely in the path of the 10th Panzer Division. German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was preparing a thrust against the overstretched American lines, hoping to break out of his bottled-up position in Tunisia. Faulty Allied intelligence kept forces weak at certain key passes in the East Dorsal Mountains, through which Rommel expected to flank his panzer divisions and roll up the American line.

Captain Jack Lake, one of the 168th RCT's company commanders, wrote later that the unit's defensive positions were stretched too thin, and there were too few radios for effective communication. Water and rations were

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scarce, and a strict blackout to prevent Axis air attacks meant the men had no warmth or sleep during the below-freezing winter nights. It made for a bad situation when the soldiers of the 168th awoke to the rumble of German tanks on February 14 (according to one 168th veteran, in the desert one could put an ear to the ground and hear tanks moving a dozen miles away).

Howitzers with the 168th RCT destroyed several armored vehicles and forced the Germans to regroup, but it was only a temporary setback. The panzers advanced again, overran the artillery, and began surrounding the men of the 168th on the hilltops. An American armored battalion sent to reinforce was cut to pieces. The 2nd Battalion was cut off and partly overrun, but the 168th had been ordered to hold at all costs and managed to do so until night fell on a desert illuminated by burning vehicles. The following night, ordered to withdraw, 2nd Battalion managed to exfiltrate through German lines under cover of darkness. However, 3rd Battalion, along with regimental commander Colonel Thomas D. Drake, was killed or captured wholesale. In the final tally, 1,853 men were lost—over half of the regiment had been annihilated.

Fortunately for Stanley Pahut, his 1st Battalion had been placed in the reserve. According to machine gunner Monty Boitnott, their position was four or five miles in the rear of the Faid Pass debacle. The remnants of the 168th pulled back with other American units, burning equipment and supplies as they retreated. It would take several days—and the infamous Battle of Kasserine Pass—for American forces to hold firm and force the Germans back.

While the 168th was battered, Allied forces in Tunisia could claim victory by May 1943 and the 168th received a much-needed rest period. The whole of the 34th Infantry Division did not directly take part in Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, but were assigned instead to supporting roles. Following the capture of Sicily on August 17, 1943, Pahut was promoted from private to corporal after two years of service.

Hard on the heels of Stanley's promotion, however, the 168th began preparing for the invasion of mainland Italy. They were designated as part of Operation Avalanche, whose objective was to seize the port of Salerno between September 3-17, 1943. Salerno's beaches, airfields, and road access would be a boon to the invading Allies if seized. Following hard fighting near Salerno, the 168th began to push inland. During this drive, Pahut was promoted to the rank of sergeant on September 28.

In October 1943, the 168th moved as part of the American VI Corps toward enemy positions on the Volturno River, inaugurating the second phase of Italian operations. The ultimate Allied objective was to prevent the Germans from strengthening their "Winter Line" across the Matese mountains. The first true barrier, however, was the Volturno River, which swelled each autumn with rain—and across which the Germans had destroyed bridges as they retreated. Daunting rain and mud made movement slow for the 34th Division.

The 168th crossed the Volturno at dawn on October 13 and took the town of Caiazzo. That night, they fought piecemeal skirmishes against Germans in the hills and gullies. Although a major objective had been achieved, the battle to get supplies across the river to sustain the fight was just beginning. Trucks and rubber floats were hit by enemy fire, forcing construction of a 30-ton bridge at Caiazzo by the men of the 16th Armored Engineers to get supplies through to the 168th. That was accomplished on October 15.

After moving through the picturesque farmland to seize Alvignano, the 168th and another unit were ordered to push on toward the town of Dragoni to drive out German occupiers. The regiment was met with mortar, artillery and machine-gun fire, then came into contact with the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, a seasoned German unit transferred from the Eastern Front. This kind of transfer was one of the overall strategic goals of the Italian campaign, relieving pressure on the Soviets and spreading German forces thin. Unfortunately, the price for success was more Allied lives.

While Pahut was engaged in a firefight, he was shot and killed on October 18, 1943, most likely in the vicinity of the tiny village of San Marco between Dragoni and Alvignano. That afternoon, German Panzer Grenadiers had made a fierce stand at San Marco, though it did little but slow VI Corps' advance. The 168th moved into Dragoni before morning on October 19, and occupied the town with no opposition from the enemy—but also without Sergeant Stanley Pahut. American casualties during the push from the Volturno to Dragoni totaled 6,846, including more than 1,300 dead.

Stanley Pahut's remains were buried temporarily in Carano, Italy. Three years later he was returned home and interred in Grafton National Cemetery on September 24, 1948. Though the Pahuts' roots were in Ohio, Grafton lay nearly 100 miles closer to Youngstown than the National Cemetery in the Buckeye State in Dayton. As a result, Stanley Pahut rests in West Virginia soil where he is honored by the people of the Mountain State.

American troops on the march through Italy.  
*Library of Congress*



**SOURCES** FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY TO BE INCLUDED IN FINAL VERSION

# SOURCES

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Full bibliographies will be included in the final draft of each biography, available later in the summer of 2024.

**The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project** is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Grant Program of the U.S. 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, Grafton High School, and University High School.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council  
 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston, WV 25301  
[wvhuman@wvhumanities.org](mailto:wvhuman@wvhumanities.org)  
[www.wvhumanities.org](http://www.wvhumanities.org)  
 304.346.8500



Veterans Legacy Grant Program  
 Department of Veterans Affairs  
 Washington D.C.

