

# WARREN HOHLFELDER

1920 –1945, WORLD WAR II

U.S. ARMY, STAFF SERGEANT

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By mid-1942, the United States was only months into a war that had consumed most of the world for the past three years. Many Americans were just coming to grips with the anxieties World War II introduced even into civilian life, especially concern for loved ones in military service far away. For George and Verna Hohlfelder in Woodville, Ohio, the war brought them many anxious nights worrying about their two sons, Warren and Edward, both overseas with the U.S. Army in different theaters of war.

The youngest of the two boys was Warren, born on September 5, 1920, in Sandusky County, Ohio. He was raised in the small town of Woodville, founded in the 1840s by settlers pushing westward. Woodville was known for its lime, which it shipped by road to Toledo and Perrysburg. Warren’s father George and brother Edward worked for one of the original lime producers in Woodville’s industry, the Ohio Hydrate & Supply Company, quarrying limestone and lime for construction and agriculture.

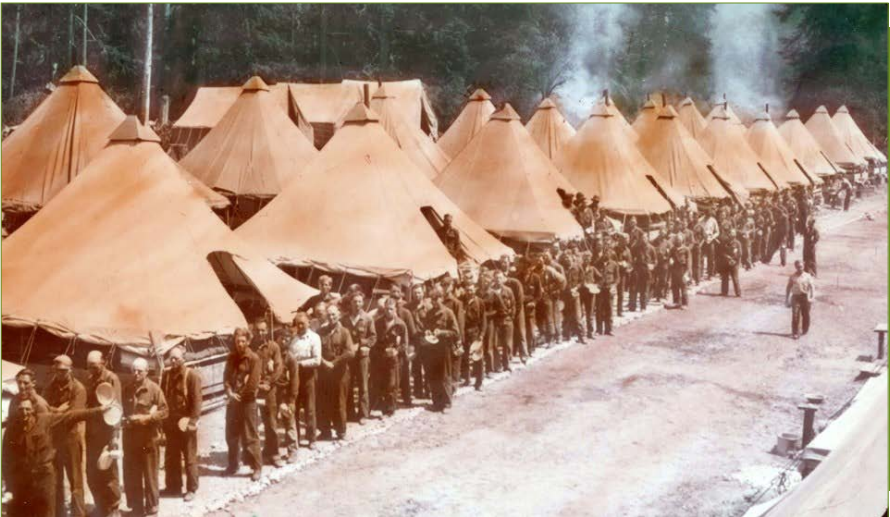
Sister Dorothy was older than Warren by five years, followed by Edward, who was two years Warren’s senior. His sister Irene was four years younger. Their mother, Verna May Hohlfelder, was a homemaker, and it was indeed their home—George made enough money to own the property outright. From this home base, Warren attended high school for three years, then went to work at the lime plant with his father and brother. In 1938, now

18 years old, Warren applied to join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

The Roosevelt administration created the CCC to help families who had been hit hard by the Great Depression, the most crippling global economic crisis in modern history. Ohio’s factories and heavy industry were especially devastated—nearby Toledo experienced 80% unemployment at one point. It is possible that, as the economic recovery of the late 1930s surged and dipped, the lime plant simply could not afford to retain three Hohlfelders on the payroll.

The CCC created work and education opportunities for unemployed men who were organized into military-style companies and tasked with executing improvements to state forests, national parks, and other federal lands. In addition to work and pay, the CCC ultimately provided a system of discipline that served many of its participants well when large numbers of enrollees found themselves in the military just a few short years later.

Enrollment in the CCC was for a period of six months to two years, and was limited to men who had family in need of support. Most of their monthly stipend was automatically mailed home and only a small portion was given directly to the CCC worker to use for necessities—ensuring it could not be spent on shortsighted impulses before reaching the worker’s family. The CCC men did not



“Chow line” at a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. This groundbreaking Great Depression relief program provided millions of men with temporary jobs and laid the foundation for much of the national and state park infrastructure in the United States, from Yellowstone to West Virginia.

National Park Service

want for essentials anyhow, since meals, lodging, transportation, and even clothing were provided.

Despite the lack of pocket money, men from each CCC camp were encouraged to visit local communities and see for themselves the wider surroundings beyond life in the camp, getting to know new parts of America. Unfortunately, despite this spirit of adventure and exploration, CCC camps were as rigidly segregated by race as the rest of American society at the time.

Shortly after his 1938 induction into the CCC, Warren attended orientation at Fort Knox, Kentucky, then was forwarded to the Ninth Army Corps headquarters at Fort Vancouver, Washington. After training, Warren wound up in one of 27 forest camps in Washington, Nevada, Montana, or California. During his time in the CCC, Warren was responsible for forest cleanup and road building in forested areas, as well as the building of facilities for campgrounds and hiking trails. Exactly which one of the camps he was stationed in is not clear, but it was the farthest from home he had ever been.

By 1940, at the latest, Warren returned home to Woodville and picked up work again alongside his father at Ohio Hydrate & Supply. On November 7, 1941, Warren married Catherine Hoodlebrink from nearby Pemberville, Ohio. She was a year younger than Warren, and was destined to not see much of him for the duration of their marriage. Exactly one month after their wedding, Japanese carrier planes

made their infamous attack on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, dragging the United States into World War II.

Warren Hohlfelder joined the Army in July 1942, shortly after the Navy’s victory at Midway brought home the first good news from the Pacific. The eldest Hohlfelder son, Edward, had joined the Army a few months before Warren and eventually deployed to England. Warren never got a furlough home and would never meet the daughter who was born in early 1943 while he was overseas. Catherine moved back in with her parents to make things easier while her husband was away.

By the time Warren completed basic training and deployed to the Pacific Theater in early 1943, the unit he joined had already seen plenty of fighting. Hohlfelder became part of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 182nd Infantry Regiment, 23rd Infantry Division—the “Americal Division,” so named for their posting the previous year on the island of New Caledonia. The division was the primary Army unit sent to reinforce, then relieve, U.S. Marines on Guadalcanal. Americal troops had slogged it out on the strategically vital island for months before finally ridding it of Japanese troops in February 1943. This appears to have been when Warren Hohlfelder arrived, just as the unit was preparing to push off from its recent victory. While Guadalcanal was to be the hardest fight in the Solomons chain, more islands were still held, and heavily fortified, by the Japanese.



The next advance in the Solomons campaign was against the island of Bougainville. Training with the 182nd Regiment for the Bougainville assault was as serene and relaxed as Hohlfelder’s time would ever be in the Pacific, a final period of calm preparation before the Americal Division embarked on two hard years of island fighting. In December 1943 all efforts turned to the next battle.

From November 1943 to August 1944, the campaign for Bougainville was bitter and protracted, but it was a necessary step to cut off a major Japanese base at Rabaul on nearby New Britain. U.S. forces needed Bougainville’s airfields—it was the logical step after securing Guadalacanal. With 3,800 square miles of mountainous, dense jungle defended by nearly 40,000 Japanese, it was not an easy prize for the Americans to take.

Fortunately for the inexperienced Warren Hohlfelder, the Americal Division was not the first ashore in November. Marines led the initial assaults and had been on the island for weeks with another Army division. When the Americal stepped ashore on Christmas Day 1943, their mission was to relieve the Marines and gradually, methodically destroy the Japanese on Bougainville without taking too many casualties themselves.

From March 8 to 28, 1944, the Japanese played right into this objective with a major offensive on the division’s fortified positions on Cape Torokina. It was a bloodbath for the

Imperial Japanese Army, which lost over 12,000 dead and wounded to fewer than 300 Americans killed. During this weeks-long battle, Hohlfelder probably interrogated dozens of prisoners as he settled into his role as an intelligence observer in the 2nd Battalion’s Headquarters section.

At some point, his superiors had discovered Warren had talents useful beyond the battlefield. Warren’s job now was to gather field intelligence: collating data from captured enemy maps and documents, interrogating prisoners, consulting with frontline officers to keep the battalion command informed as to enemy positions and movements, and presenting briefings. On February 24, for example, as the Japanese moved into position for their attack on Cape Torokina, plans for their artillery positions were discovered on the body of a dead officer. This provided further advantages over the enemy and saved American lives.

In the first half of 1944, Warren received a commendation for bravery. He was no longer a green recruit, but an experienced soldier by the time the Americal Division left Bougainville in November 1944, turning control of the island over to Australian troops. The division’s next operation was much larger: securing the Philippines, which American forces had begun retaking from the

The imposing jungle terrain of Bougainville, Solomon Islands, where Hohlfelder first saw action.

Naval History & Heritage Command



Japanese in October. Shortly after the regiment shipped out, Warren was promoted to staff sergeant of the Intelligence section of 2nd Battalion on December 12, 1944. The Hohlfelder family back in Woodville proudly reported his success to the local newspaper.

As on Bougainville, the Americal Division did not comprise the first invasion waves. Their arrival on Leyte, the fourth largest island in the Philippines, coincided with mop-up operations. Landing on January 24, 1945, they set to work clearing Japanese mines and unexploded bombs on Leyte. Their primary task, however, was preparations for landing on Cebu island, a short hop across the Camotes Sea from Leyte. This time, however, the Americal boys did conduct combat landings, and were up against an equal number of Japanese troops.

Warren’s 182nd Infantry Regiment landed four

miles from Cebu City on the morning of March 26. The initial wave encountered a minefield that required hours to clear, but the division took Cebu City within a day of the landings. The battle was far from over, however.

A more serious fight developed for Lahug Airfield, the only Japanese airstrip on Cebu. The 182nd Infantry Regiment was tasked with securing it, and Hohlfelder’s 2nd Battalion found resistance light at the airfield itself on March 28. As they pushed forward to maintain contact with the enemy retreating into the surrounding heights, however, Warren and his comrades discovered the hills around Lahug were heavily fortified. As darkness fell, Japanese artillery and mortar fire swept the 182nd’s positions.

In this nighttime confusion, Warren was probably probing ahead with 2nd Battalion’s lead

Americal Division GIs remove Japanese land mines from the outskirts of Cebu City. National Archives







Field interrogations such as this were familiar scenes to Staff Sgt. Hohlfelder. Here, Americal Division officers question Filipinos brought in for questioning by Cebu guerillas the day before Hohlfelder was killed.

National Archives

elements, gathering information on the enemy entrenchments. At some point during the night, he fell fatally wounded from a machine gun bullet to the head. The official date of death given was March 29. Though the pacification of Cebu took several more months, Warren Hohlfelder was one of only 420 Americans killed by the enemy on Cebu—more dangerous by far was the malaria, hepatitis, and other tropical maladies that incapacitated some 8,000 Americans on the island.

Cebu was the division’s last combat operation; the invasion of Japan for which they trained afterward never came. If Warren had made it just a few weeks longer, he probably would have returned home safely to his wife, and the baby girl he never met.

During his brief career, Warren advanced from technician fifth grade to battalion clerk, then operations sergeant and staff sergeant in 2nd Battalion’s Intelligence section. He spent some 24 months overseas, and was awarded the Combat Infantryman’s Badge and Good Conduct Medal.

His wife Catherine received Warren’s personal effects on October 11, 1945, including his wedding ring, wallet, cigarette case, and six photographs. His remains were initially buried on Cebu, but moved to Leyte in January 1946. His father George Hohlfelder finally received word from the Quartermaster General’s office on June 30, 1949, that the family should begin making plans for the return of their son’s remains. The family first

planned to have him buried near their home in Woodville, but in September advised the Army that they preferred burial at the nearest available national cemetery. On October 19, 1949, Warren’s remains departed New Jersey on a train bound for Grafton, West Virginia.

George and Verna Hohlfelder, accompanied by his sisters Dorothy and Irene and his brother Edward, traveled more than 300 miles to attend the burial service for their boy. There is no record that his widow Catherine or daughter Rosalyn—now six years old—were present for the service. Like many young, widowed mothers whose partners fell in battle, Catherine had to balance the tragedy of her loss with the need to support her child.

Warren posthumously received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal. More importantly, Edward Hohlfelder named a son for his fallen brother, carrying Warren’s name into a future beyond the iron gates and stone walls of Grafton National Cemetery.



PLACE OF INTERMENT:  
Grafton National Cemetery  
SECTION A  
SITE 110



Insert of a 1944 “newsmap” of the Philippines istributed to U.S. armed forces service members, designed to make it easier for American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to follow the war’s progress. *National Archives*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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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, among many others.

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For readability, bibliographies have been omitted from this publication. Student research for these biographies relies heavily on primary sources—census records, city directories, draft cards, muster rolls, and more—made available digitally through Ancestry and Fold3. Yearbook repositories and the digitized collections of many universities and archives have been invaluable resources. Most newspaper research was conducted digitally via Newspapers.com, NewspaperArchives, and the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America* database.

Servicemembers’ Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) and Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) are another essential part of project research, provided free of charge in most cases by the National Archives through standard records requests.

As the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project has grown and matured, the team has found that new sources sometimes surface for veterans researched in prior project years. To better maintain a “living bibliography” of all its veterans, a single master document is kept up on the project’s webpage under the “Programs” tab at [www.wvhumanities.org](http://www.wvhumanities.org).

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