

## **Fred A. Steiner (1899 – 1944)**

In Feb 1943, LCOL Steiner was stationed at Camp Gordon, Georgia. Lt. Col. Fred Alvin Steiner was killed in action in Normandy on June 19, 1944. He was the executive officer of the 8th Infantry Regiment, of the Fourth Infantry Division. His wife, Mrs Neil Gibbs Steiner lived at 55 I Street, Chula Vista, CA.

On June 6, 1944 the 8th Infantry had the privilege of being the point of landings on Utah Beach. The objective was to move quickly to the west to take the strategic port of Cherbourg. Col. Steiner was in the second wave and the first field grade officer on the beach where he earned the Bronze Star in directing the initial attack.

The Germans mounted a counter attack on the freshly landed troops. Col. Steiner quickly organized a defense and a successful attack which drove the Germans back and saved the landing from disaster. For his leadership and quick thinking he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the country's second highest award for gallantry in combat.

The regiment pressed forward against determined resistance in order to seize and cut the railroad to Cherbourg at the village of Monteburg. The dense forest, undergrowth and hedgerows, concealed the defending Germans. Col. Steiner took personal command of two reinforced battalions and after an intense battle took Monteburg and cut the railroad. He earned the Silver Star for his heroism in this battle.

The regimental commander, Col. James A. Van Fleet, was wounded and withdrew from the front so that Col. Steiner had command of the regiment as it approached the outskirts of Cherbourg. The advance was held up. Col. Steiner went forward to direct the advance and while exposed was killed in a German artillery barrage. He was awarded the Purple Heart posthumously.

Cherbourg fell shortly thereafter. Its capture was essential as a port to supply the invasion, and without which the invasion would have failed. Col. Steiner's heroism was an important part of that success.

Who was Col. Steiner? He had received his 2nd Lt.'s commission in 1917 through college ROTC at the University of Iowa, but World War I was over before he could embark for France. He remained in the commissioned reserve on inactive status until he volunteered for active duty in 1939.

He attended law school at Vanderbilt in Nashville. After graduation he came to San Diego in 1923 and established a well-regarded and successful practice of law as a leading jury trial lawyer in San Diego. He was also very active in public affairs, the Masonic Orders and the Chula Vista Methodist Church.

He had a great love of horses and was an excellent horseman. In 1933 he established his family home on a ranch in Bonita (now the site of Rohr Park). Two years later he moved into the City of Chula Vista, then a town of about 4000, and raised horses on a site a short

distance south of the old Bradley residence, now known as Vista Hill Sanitarium. In 1937, he built his permanent home on 8 acres on the I Street hill where he raised horses on his ranch. I Street was then a dirt road, with the view of the ocean over a sea of lemon trees.

He was 40 years old in 1939, happily married with four small children and a large mortgage on his ranch. He stepped aside from his successful law practice and elected to report for active duty. He first served as adjutant of the Ninth Corps where he signed orders assigning friends to service in various Pacific ports, to include the Philippines before our country was involved in the Japanese war. His administrative skills were well regarded and he was transferred to the War Department in Washington, D.C. in 1941. After Pearl Harbor, on his adamant insistence, he was transferred to the field to serve in the Infantry. He was chosen by then Col. Van Fleet to be his executive officer in the 8th Infantry.

Together with other excellent officers they trained and built the 4th motorized infantry division under the direct supervision of General Patton. The expectation was service in the North African Campaign, but that campaign went so quickly they were re-assigned instead to the Normandy invasion as regular infantry. Because of his leadership the 8th Infantry earned the right to be the point of the Utah Beach landings on June 6, 1944.

A brief history of the Fourth Infantry Division follows:

*From August 1940 through August 1943, the division participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers, was moved to the newly opened Camp Gordon, GA where they participated in the Carolina Maneuvers, and was moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey before being redesignated the 4th Infantry Division. A movement in September 1943 to Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida gave the division realistic amphibious training in preparation for the assault on fortress Europe. January 18, 1944 saw the Ivy Division embark the port of New York en route to a final training phase in England. Chosen as the spearhead amphibious division of the D-Day landing on the Normandy coast of France, the men of the 4th Infantry Division stormed ashore at H-Hour (0630 hours) on a stretch of the French coast named, for this operation, Utah Beach. It was for his actions on this day that assistant division commander; Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. earned the first Medal of Honor in the division. The division was in continuous action during the period 6-28 June when the last resistance around Cherbourg was eliminated.*

He willingly volunteered before the attack on Pearl Harbor to do what he believed honorable men must do to serve their country in the face of tyranny. He earned the accolades of his country and his place in history.

He was commanding a task force assigned the mission of eliminating an enemy salient and preventing the enemy from concentrating in the French city in the area of Normandy. His citation for bravery states (for which he was awarded the silver star as well as a bronze star) :

*“During the entire operation which continued for three days, Colonel Steiner exhibited utter disregard for his own life and outstanding leadership in the performance of arduous duty. He continuously advanced with the foremost elements of his command under hostile enemy operations. He manifested exceptional ability, displaying ingenuity, sagacity, and his courage was an inspiration to all who served under him, reflecting great credit upon himself and the military service”*

It is indeed fitting that the City of Chula Vista has recognized him by naming a street in his honor to remind us of his contribution and sacrifice. He is buried at the Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego, CA.

