

Nicholas, Vandan A. (899th)



Vandan A. Nicholas

Biography: Vandan A. Nicholas was born on March 24, 1916, in Forest City, Iowa. He was one of six children born to Abijah Julius Conrad Nicholas and Mamie Jane Hiddleston.

Service Time: Vandan entered the service in 1941, and after his initial training was assigned to C Company of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The unit shipped out from the New York port in January 13, 1943, and arrived at Casablanca, Morocco, on the 26th, where they were issued new M10 tank destroyers. They were deployed to the Gafsa-El Guettar sector, Tunisia, on March 16th.

They established the first American contact with the British Eighth Army on April 7th. They then arrived in the Naples, Italy, area on November 10th. They almost immediately shifted to the United Kingdom and liaison personnel accompanied second glider lift of the 82d Airborne Division during the invasion of Normandy. The main battalion landed at Utah Beach on D-Day. and helped capture Cherbourg, France, in late June.

The unit history relates, *"During this month (July) we struck out and help stop Jerry's counter-attack toward the sea, in the vicinity of St. Jean-de-Day. It was about this time that "A" and "C" Companies had a field day on German armor at close range. It was one of those operations that you just "do" . . . we did and came out on top. On the morning of July 11th, at 0200 hours, a strong German counterattack, led by enemy*

tanks and supporting infantry, had developed directly opposite these, two companies. These spearheads contacted our waiting TD's; enemy tanks and lots of them! Firing at pointblank range, we stopped Jerry's attack cold. At the end of the day our "C" Company had destroyed six MK V's and a machine gun nest. While "A" Company destroyed 6 MK V's, 1 MK IV, 1 SP 75 mm gun, 3 MG nests and 2 AT grenade emplacements, and also captured 22 PW's. Later we learned that a mile down the road from our positions, there were 50 more tanks waiting to exploit a breakthrough. They were given a thorough going over by our Air Force. "A" and "C" Companies had completely destroyed Jerry's attempt to split the beachhead. It was for this action that "A" and "C" Companies received the Presidential Citation on December 11, 1944."



We do not know the circumstances but Sergeant Vandan A. Nicholas was identified as missing in action on July 13, 1944. His body was never found but he is remembered on the Tablets of the Missing at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France. Vandan was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart.

His family was notified that he was missing in action in 1944, but it would be a year later that his death was made official. Vandan's niece, Kay, related the event that two officer's came to the bank in Rippey, Iowa, where her aunt Marjorie was working. They asked the location of the Nicholas' residence. Marjorie heard them and took the information from them and gave it to her father. The entire family broke down in tears at the news. Vandan's mother Mamie had passed away in June of 1943.

A memorial stone for Vandan was placed in the Rippey Cemetery, in Rippey Iowa.