

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution
Proudly “Spotlights” our July 2011
Patriot of the Month



**Jurdon “Ralph”
Henderson**

Sponsored by:

**Cornelia Greene Chapter
St. Louis, Missouri**

Jurdon “Ralph” Henderson was born in 1917 and raised on a farm outside Garland, Texas by his Great Uncle and Aunt after his mother died of Spanish Flu in 1918. He also survived the Great Depression, the Giant American Dust Storms, only to become involved in World War II.

Ralph ran his way into college as a half-miler first in the Dallas High School Track Competition, to Paris College, and then on a scholarship to Texas A&M University. He was also awarded a football scholarship to Texas A&M. Immediately after his graduation in 1941, he was drafted into Patton’s Horse Cavalry and was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas. He was transferred to Republic Flats Officer Training School where he graduated as a First Lieutenant.

Ralph was assigned to the Louisiana Forest Pacific Island training ground as an Executive Officer for the 15th Cavalry Corps. He then transferred to Camp Coxcomb, California for desert training. There he was placed in charge of moving the 17th Cavalry to Trowbridge, England on the Queen Mary to act as security for the European Invasion ships. He took Patton’s reserve to Utah Beach six days after the invasion and was selected to lead the Brittany breakout

on August 1, 1944.

He was promoted to Captain and led C-troop of the 17th Cavalry through Brittany clearing it of German resistance by the end of November. He and the 17th Cavalry were transferred to Holland to act as security for Patton's 9th Army. They held position north of the German breakout in the Battle of the Bulge and then led the 9th Army's breakout into Germany in early January 1945. They captured the city of Hamm, Germany (250,000 population) and then were told to stand down. In Germany, Captain Henderson's troop attained the unique distinction of being the first to link up with the British and Canadian troops in the north, thus establishing a solid front of Allied armies east of the Roer River. Germany surrendered in early May.

Ralph was awarded the Purple Heart for a knee injury suffered when his jeep was hit by artillery round. He refused hospitalization and stayed in command of his troops.

On March 1, 1945, in Holland, Captain Henderson swam 185 feet to the enemy side of the frozen Roer River, which contained wire entanglements, mines and a strong icy current. He took a lifeline to rescue wounded engineers he had sent across the river and who had triggered a booby trap. As they were being pulled back across in their boat, it was hit by an ice chunk and capsized. Captain Henderson, along with the aid of three men righted the boat, placed the wounded men back in the boat and guided the frail craft safely to the American side of the river. He was awarded the Silver Star for his bravery.

Ralph was awarded the Bronze Star for leading the first American troops to link up with the British and Canadian forces in sealing off over 250,000 German captives.

Ralph met General Patton while at the Horse Cavalry School in Fort Riley, Kansas and they became close friends. Throughout the war, the two remained in contact on an almost daily basis as they moved across Europe.

After the war, he was awarded a personal Croix de Guerre with a Silver Star by the French government for his actions in liberating the Brittany Peninsula from German occupation.

After the war, Ralph worked as a chief chemist from 1946 until his retirement in 1982. He is married to Mary Etta Garner, of Garland, Texas, and they have three children. Ralph is active in his Methodist Church and the American Legion. He has enjoyed traveling, golf, football, and track and field. A book about his life was recently completed titled, *Generation of Survivors*.