

A Manchester WWII hero

MONUMENTAL GENERATION

MANCHESTER — Roger O. Boissonneault was born on Oct. 2, 1924, to West-Siders Donat and Henriette (Simard) Boissonneault. He was the oldest of three sons and attended Ste. Marie's grammar school and two years at the Marist Brothers High School in Tyngsboro, Mass. After leaving high school, he went to work at the Evangeline Shoe Company and then for the Bee Bee Shoe Company. He also began courting his childhood sweetheart, Therese Gingras.

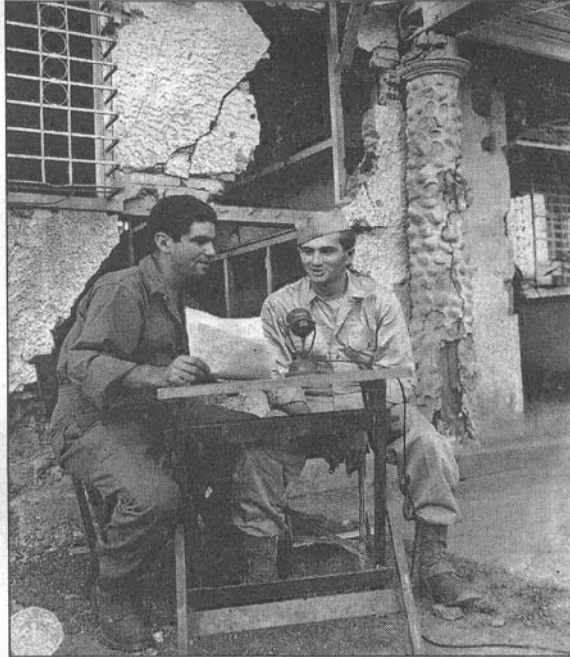
When the war broke out, Boissonneault seriously considered enlisting in the service, but his family was poor and needed his income to make ends meet. His parents asked him to wait to go in the service until he was drafted.

He was drafted in March 1943 and was sent to Fort McClellan in Alabama for basic training. Afterward, he was shipped to Fort Ord in California. It was the home of the 43rd Infantry Division. Following training, Boissonneault shipped out to New Caledonia, arriving there in December 1943. He was later deployed to New Zealand, where he joined the 43rd Division while it was on leave after fighting on New Georgia in the Solomon Islands.

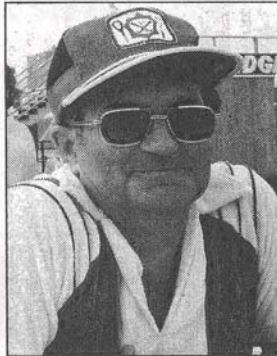
Boissonneault first saw action in New Guinea, where he was involved in the landings along the coast. The 43rd Division relieved another unit that had secured control of an airfield. His company set up a defensive position, and the Japanese attempted to retake the airfield. The attack was repulsed; his battalion went on the offensive and pushed the Japanese into the jungle at the Driniumor River.

The U.S. troops took heavy casualties. Rain, jungle and mud made life miserable. Boissonneault said the jungle was the second enemy; in fact, he contracted hepatitis and had to be hospitalized.

On Jan. 9, 1945, the 43rd Division participated in the first wave of an amphibious landing on the Philippine island of Luzon. The 43rd was positioned on the left flank. Within a few days, Gen. Walter Krueger's Sixth Army landed almost 175,000 troops. A total of 203,608 were eventually landed, establishing a 20-mile beachhead. The Japanese put up little resistance on the beach; instead they were prepared to fight in the jungle. The



COURTESY



Roger O. Boissonneault, a machine gunner, above, at right, in the 43rd Division, participated in the first wave of an amphibious landing on the Philippine island of Luzon on Jan. 9, 1945. After his discharge, he returned home to Manchester and married his childhood sweetheart, Therese Gingras. He worked at Bee Bee Shoes until the early 1970s and then as an electrician at St. Anselm College before retiring.

43rd moved inland quickly and began to encounter increased Japanese resistance.

On Jan. 12, Boissonneault was wounded when a bullet hit the edge of his helmet and fragments struck the back of his head. He lived with a souvenir of the fighting for the rest of his life; a helmet fragment remained in his head. He recuperated from his wound for a few weeks and then returned to his unit for the rest of the campaign. The unit was in combat from January to May, fighting at various locations such as the Shimbu line, Clark Field and Manila.

Following his December 1945 discharge, Boissonneault returned home to Manchester. In May 1946, he married Therese Gingras. He worked at Bee Bee Shoes until the early 1970s and then for Saint Anselm College as an electrician. He retired in 1990 and died a few months later.

Pierre Boissonneault said his father would occasionally talk about his time in the war but rarely offered anything specific.

He would recall days of boredom followed by hours of terror, and he talked about mud and rain and heat. He did not feel there was anything glorious about war. His attitude was that he was doing his part just like everybody else, and when the war was over he just wanted to get home and live his life.

Your financial help is still needed to complete the Manchester World War II Memorial. If you would like to donate, please send a check to the Manchester World War II Memorial, 1 City Hall Plaza, Manchester NH 03101. You can also donate online by major credit card or Paypal at www.ManchesternhwwII Memorial.com; click on the donate tab.

There are a limited number of copies available of "Manchester's Honored Veterans," the collector's booklet published by the Manchester Veterans Council. You can receive a copy by donating \$100 to the memorial. If you're interested, call me at 391-7920.

— Gene Mackie