



Douglas D. Johnson

Sgt. Douglas D. Johnson

Born: December 18, 1916

Killed in Action: April 4, 1945

Douglas "Doug" Dunn Johnson was born on December 18, 1916, the son of John Friou and Lelia Epps Johnson. John was born on September 8, 1884, and Lelia was born on July 21, 1885. They were married on December 6, 1905. Doug's paternal grandparents were Junious and Susan Johnson, and his maternal grandparents were Francis and Elizabeth Epps. Doug's only sibling was a brother, John Freor Johnson, that was about eight years older. Unfortunately, Doug's father died on August 21, 1917, when Doug was only eight months old.

In 1931, when Doug was 14, his mother, Lelia, re-married Walter Bernard Baird, Sr. Mr. Baird's first wife, Ivy Rebecca (Hennaman), with whom he had three children, died on August 6, 1929. Those children were Walter Bernard Baird, Jr., Pearl A. Baird and Janice Baird. After Mr. Baird married Lelia Johnson, the family lived on Queen St. in Disputanta, Virginia. At this time Mr. Baird was the mail carrier for the area and the children went to Disputanta School, which housed all grade levels in the one frame building. During that time Mr. Baird attended Mt. Sinai Church, whereas Doug and the rest of the family attended Trinity Methodist Church.

Doug's step-sister Janice, who is 11 years younger, recalled that he was a quiet, sweet person with red hair. For her spending money, Doug would pay her to make pimento cheese sandwiches for his lunch. Janice also said that her step-mother, Lelia, was a strong woman who could shoot a gun and would go up on their house roof to make repairs. For additional income, she provided meals in their house for local workers.

After finishing school, Doug married the former Mary Alice Livsie on February 5, 1942, and before entering the service he worked for Virginia Lens Company. Also during this period, he was able to buy a 1940 Ford Deluxe convertible that he loved to drive with the top down as shown below.



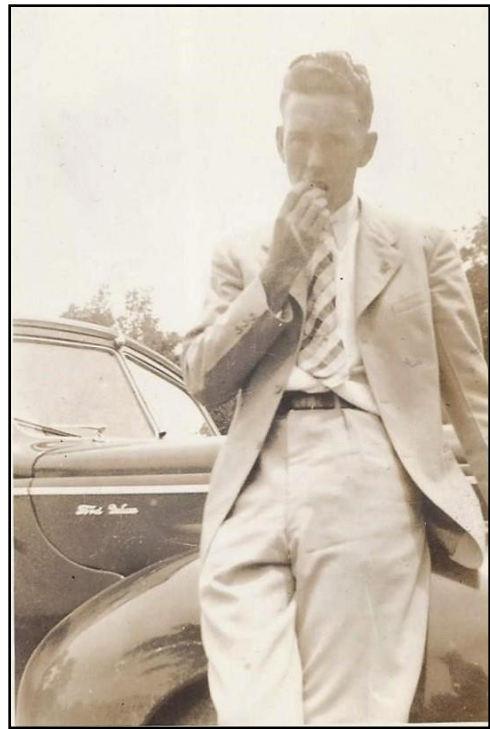
Doug sitting in his 1940 Ford



Doug and Alice sitting on their car.

Doug liked his Ford very much, keeping it and polished. He was very disappointed when he was in a bad accident with it, ruining it beyond repair.

Notice that Doug and Alice got married just two months after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. A few days later, the United States declared war on Japan and Germany. Soon afterwards Italy declared war on the United States. Doug and Alice were probably looking forward to a peaceful married life before the United States was thrown into war.



Doug with his car.

Note "Ford Deluxe" on the side of the hood.



Doug and Alice on a trip.

Note mountains in the background.



*Doug with his Aunt Sadie (l)
and his mother, Lelia (r)*

Doug joined the Army on April 7, 1942, just two months after he got married. The pictures below were taken late the following month, on May 31, 1942, near Jefferson City, Tennessee, possibly where he was undergoing training.



Before going overseas Doug was able to come home for one or more visits. Although the pictures below on this page while he was home are not dated, based on the warm clothing they are wearing and that there are no leaves on the trees in the background, the pictures were taken in cold weather after the trees dropped their leaves. Thus, they were possibly taken in the Winter of 1943 or the Winter of 1944. In these pictures, Doug does not have his rank on the visible coat sleeve, so he may have been a Private during this time frame. On November 18, 1943, Alice gave birth to their only child, Douglas D. Johnson, Jr., who sadly only lived three days. His son is buried at Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia. Doug was still in the U.S. when his son died, not leaving for Europe until the following Spring.



Doug and Alice on Queen Street in Disputanta while he was home on leave.



Doug with his sister, Janice, and his mother at their Queen Street, Disputanta home.

Doug was assigned to Company B, 23rd Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division. On April 20, 1944, while stationed at Ft. Benning, Georgia, the unit left on a train for Camp Standish, Massachusetts, arriving two days later. They stayed there for a short time before going to Camp Shanks, New York, not far from New York City, where they continued training. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the unit left Camp Standish and went to New York City, boarding the *RMA Queen Mary* to go to overseas. The *RMA Queen Mary* was a luxury liner that was converted to a troop transport ship for World War II, sometimes carrying over 15,000 troops at a time. The ship arrived in Scotland on June 13, 1944, at Firth of Clyde at Greenock. Two days later the unit transferred by train to Tidworth, England and resumed training.

On August 8, 1944, the unit boarded the *USS Phillip S. Thomas* to cross the English Channel and unloaded at Vesley, France on August 11, 1944. The next day they moved south towards the interior of France, passing a military cemetery with hundreds of graves from the recent fighting. On August 15, 1944, the unit was involved in the Battle of Chartres, where they suffered numerous casualties. Afterwards they continued east where on September 6, 1944, the unit was involved in the ferocious fighting near Dornot, France along the Moselle River, suffering even more casualties.

Later in September, the unit traveled north through Belgium, arriving at Deurne, Holland on September 30, 1944. During heavy fighting there, Doug, who was now a Private First Class, was wounded in the arm on October 1, 1944, and sent to a field hospital for treatment. Following combat action in Holland, the unit moved back into Belgium where on December 17, 1944, they engaged in the Battle of the Bulge in the St. Vith area. The unit sustained more losses during the Battle of the Bulge and many were captured.

It is not known when PFC Johnson returned to his unit, however based on available records, it may have been no later than the end January 1945. By March 1945, his unit had moved into Germany. On April 1, 1945, PFC Johnson was promoted to Sergeant. He was serving with his unit when he was killed in action a few days later on April 4, 1945. At the time he was killed, his unit was operating between the cities of Küstelberg and Grönebach while the unit was advancing towards Hildfeld in Germany.



This partial map of Germany shows the approximate area where Sgt. Douglas Johnson died on April 4, 1945, which is about 275 miles southwest of Berlin.

Sgt. Johnson's step-sister, Janice, recalled the day when his mother, Lelia, was notified of his death. His mother said that once President Franklin D. Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, she felt that Doug would also die. Although President Roosevelt died eight days after Doug, it was typical during World War II for military death notifications to take several weeks if not longer. Therefore, his mother was not aware Doug had already been killed when the President's death was announced.

In addition to Doug, his brother Walter B. Baird, Jr. and Pearl's husband, Rex Brugh, also served in World War II. Both of them survived the war, however, Doug had a cousin, George T. Peebles that was killed on October 26, 1944, in the Philippines area while serving with the Navy. On the Baird side of the family, their cousin Robert Benson Baird, died on July 7, 1944, in Normandy, France while serving in the Army. It was not uncommon during World War II that many, if not all, young men in the same family served in the military. Unfortunately, the two members of their family listed above also perished in service in addition to Sgt. Douglas Johnson.

As was the practice in World War II, deceased service members were first buried in temporary cemeteries in secure areas near the combat theater where they were serving. Following his death, Sgt. Johnson was taken from Germany and buried in the temporary military cemetery just east of Margraten, Netherlands.

The small city of Margraten is located in a farming region the southeastern corner of the Netherlands which, in September 1944, was one of the first areas in the Netherlands to be liberated from German control. With assistance from a Margraten town official, the American Graves Registration Command selected a location for the cemetery in the farm fields outside of town and began building the cemetery. Soon afterwards, in November 1944, deceased American service members began to be brought from surrounding combat zones for interment at the Margraten temporary cemetery, and continued to be brought there from other temporary cemeteries and isolated graves for re-interment for months after the war ended in Europe. In October 1946, the cemetery was selected to be one of several new permanent American cemeteries in Europe and was named the Netherlands American Cemetery.

In 1948, the military gave the all the deceased's next of kin the option of having the remains of their relatives that died in World War II around the world to be re-interred in one of the permanent overseas American cemeteries or returned to the United States for burial in a cemetery of their choice. In the case of Sgt. Johnson, his family decided to leave him in the Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten. His permanent grave there is located at Plot A, Row 9, Grave 14.

Soon after the first Americans were buried in the temporary Margraten cemetery in November 1944, families in Margraten began to adopt the American graves. An adoption system was established that continues to this day in which the adopting Netherland citizens regularly place flowers on the graves they adopted. All of the 8,301 graves in the cemetery have been adopted by a citizen of the Netherlands. The organization that coordinates and maintains the adoption system is the "Foundation for Adopting Graves at the American Cemetery in Margraten".

Janice remembered that a Dutch family contacted her mother to let her know that they were looking after Doug's grave. The first adopter of Sgt. Johnson's grave was the Dijkmans family, who is possibly the family that originally corresponded with his mother. Currently, Mr. Gerard Laugs and his family have adopted Sgt. Johnson's grave. Mr. Laugs and his family live in the town of Ohé en Laak about 30 miles north of the cemetery in Margraten. They adopted Sgt. Johnson's grave in 2007 and go there several times a year to

place flowers on the grave, as well as an adjacent grave of a soldier from Massachusetts he adopted. Photographs of Sgt. Johnson's headstone with flowers placed there by the Laugs family are at the end of this document.

Since Sgt. Johnson's permanent grave is in the Netherlands American Cemetery, his mother had the memorial monument shown below placed in the Johnson family cemetery plot at Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia. It was placed next to his father's grave and is surrounded by the graves of other Johnson family members. Sgt. Johnson's mother, Lelia Johnson Baird, died on May 21, 1978 at age 92 and is buried next to her first husband, John F. Johnson, on the opposite side of his headstone from Sgt. Johnson's memorial monument.



Sgt. Douglas D. Johnson's Memorial Monument in the Johnson Family Plot at Blandford Cemetery, Petersburg, Virginia

In recognition for his service Sgt. Douglas D. Johnson received the following awards.

- ★ Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster*
- ★ Combat Infantryman Badge
- ★ American Campaign Medal
- ★ World War II Victory Medal

*Oak Leaf Cluster signifies the second award of the medal as a result of his previous wound on October 1, 1944.

In Sgt. Johnson's honor, his name is inscribed on the glass shrine wall at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia and on the War Memorial Monument at the Prince George County Regional Heritage Center at Prince George, Virginia. In addition, his service is recognized in the National WWII Memorial database, the Honor States website and the 7th Armored Division website.

At the time of his death, Sgt. Johnson was survived by his wife of three years, Alice L. Johnson, his mother, Lelia Johnson Baird, step-father Walter B. Baird, Sr., sisters Janice Baird and Pearl Baird Brugh, and brothers John F. Johnson and Walter B. Baird, Jr.

At the time this biography was developed in late 2017 and early 2018, Sgt. Johnson was still survived by his step-sister Mrs. Janice Baird Tyler, who provided the collection of family information, memories and pictures included in this document. Sadly, Mrs. Tyler passed away on March 9, 2018, just after this memorial remembrance was finalized.

Virginia War Memorial, Richmond, Virginia



Sgt. Douglas D. Johnson's name as inscribed on the Glass Shrine Wall at the Virginia War Memorial

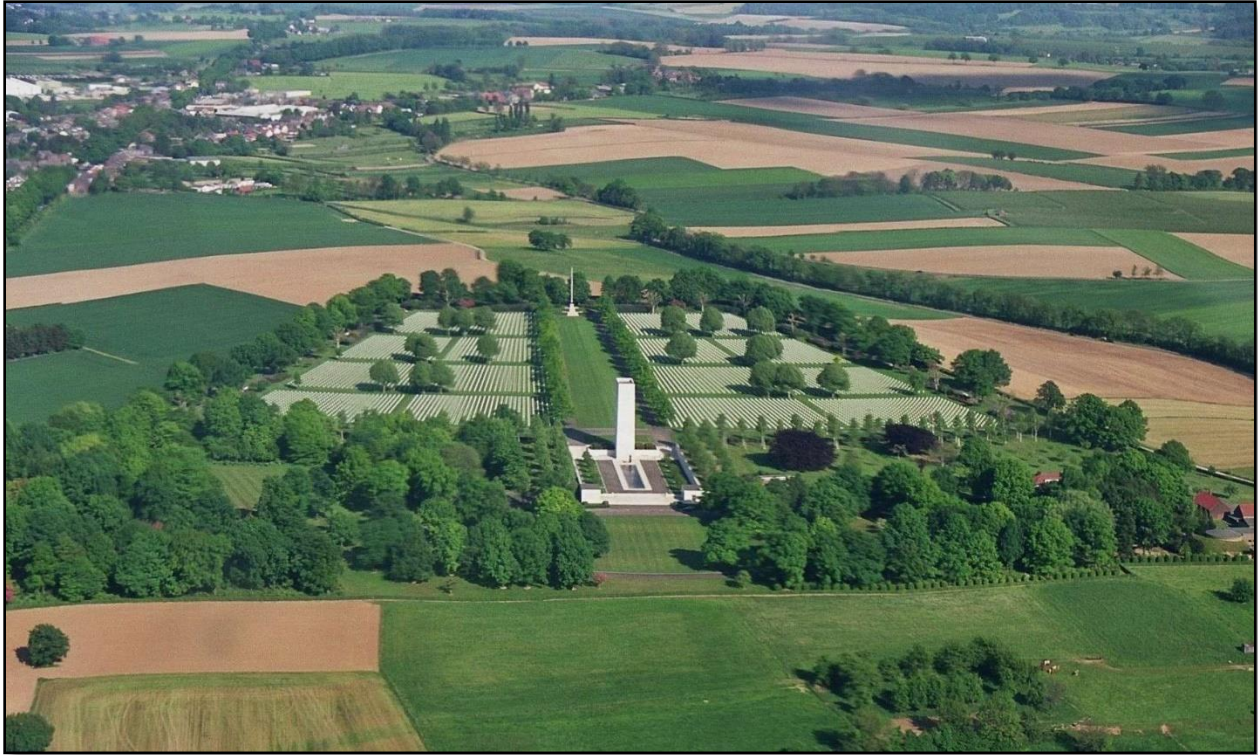


**Prince George County War Memorial
at the Historic Prince George Courthouse**



***Sgt. Douglas D. Johnson's name as inscribed on the
Prince George County War Memorial***





The Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten, the Netherlands.

(Photograph courtesy of the Foundation for Adopting Graves at the American Cemetery in Margraten)

The city of Margraten is in the upper left corner of the photograph above of the Netherlands American Cemetery. The cemetery is still surrounded by farm land as it was when it was first created in October 1944. Divided in sixteen plots, designated "A" through "P", Sgt. Johnson is buried in Plot A, which is the lower left section of headstones in this view.

The cemetery is operated and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission, however the citizens of the Netherlands that have adopted all 8,301 graves there adorn the headstones with flowers to pay their respects. Part of the cemetery complex are the Tablets of the Missing on which the names of 1,722 are listed, which have also all been adopted.

Numerous yearly events and observances are held at the cemetery as follows:

- May 2 – 6: Faces of Margraten when photographs are displayed next to the headstones and on the Tablets of the Missing.
- May 4: Commemoration Day when the Netherlands grieves for the people killed in war.
- May 5: Liberation Day to mark the end of Nazi Germany occupation of the Netherlands.
- May 27: American Memorial Day honoring those that died while in the service of the United States.
- September 9: Liberation Concert in remembrance of the liberation of the Netherlands that began in September 1944
- November 11: Veterans Day honoring veterans of all wars.

As listed above, from May 2 until May 6 every year, the Faces of Margraten program is conducted at the Netherlands American Cemetery when photographs of those buried there are displayed next to their headstones or at the Tablets of the Missing where their name is listed. Of the more than 10,000 headstones and names listed, as of May 2018 over 5000 pictures have been collected and are displayed during this remembrance program. The photograph of Sgt. Douglas D. Johnson furnished by his step-sister Janice on the cover of this document was provided to the Faces of Margraten organization and it was displayed beside his cemetery plot for the first time in 2018. Below is his cemetery plot with his photograph displayed, courtesy of his grave adopter, Mr. Gerard Laugs.



Sgt. Johnson's cemetery plot on Liberation Day, May 5, 2018, which coincided with the Faces of Margraten program.

Photograph and flowers by Mr. Gerard Laugs and family.

***Final Resting Place
Netherlands American Cemetery
Margraten, Netherlands
(Flowers provided by the Laugs Family of Ohé en Laak, the Netherlands)***



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Mr. G.H.H.L. Laugs and Family