

**Roland S. Epps, Sr.**

**Roland S. Epps, Sr.**  
**Sergeant, U.S. Army**  
Born March 11, 1925  
Died in Service February 10, 1946

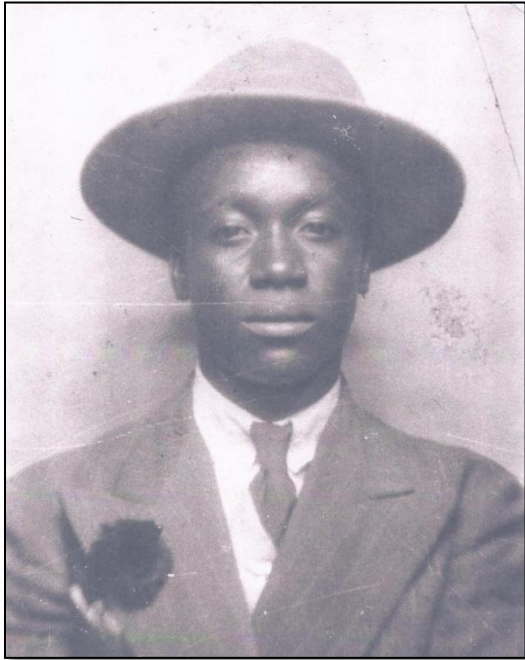
Roland S. Epps, Sr. was born on March 11, 1925, and was raised in the eastern side of Prince George County. He was the second child and oldest son of Peter and Eva Banks Epps. He had five sisters; Theresa, Olga, Vivian, Wanza and Lillian, as well as four brothers; Norman, Daniel, Calvin and Delano. Roland's paternal grandparents were Peter and Martha Howard Epps, and his maternal grandparents were Daniel and Emma Brown Banks. The 1930 U.S. Census showed that that the Epps family lived on Pole Run Road where Peter Epps was a farmer. By 1940 they had moved to Rt. 10 in Prince George at which time Peter Epps worked at a saw mill. The Epps family attended Morning Star Baptist Church in Burrowsville.

Roland attended Disputanta Training School, located in the community of Disputanta across Rt. 460 from the First Baptist Church. At that time schools required eleven years of education to graduate and Roland's military records shows he attended all eleven years. Since the school was many miles away from their house, it was a long trip to the school for Roland and his siblings.



*The Disputanta Training School in Disputanta, Virginia where Roland and his siblings attended school.  
The building is still in use as of 2016 as a construction office.*

On June 12, 1944, Roland married Juanitha Jernell Wynn, and they lived in Spring Grove, Virginia where he made a living as a farmer. Soon after Roland and Juanitha were married, he was inducted in the Army on September 26, 1944. At the time of his induction in the Army, he was listed as being 5 ft 9 in tall and weighed 150 lbs.



*Above: Roland before entering the Army.*



*Right: Juanitha and Roland.*

The army sent Roland to Ft. Lewis, Washington where he was assigned to the 54<sup>th</sup> Army Services Field Training Center from October 1944 until March 1945 for Basic Training. On March 21, 1945, he was re-assigned to the 55<sup>th</sup> Engineering Training Battalion at Fort Lewis, by which time he had attained the rank of Private First Class.

On April 16, 1945, Roland was transferred to the 3161<sup>st</sup> Engineer Firefighting Platoon, also there at Ft. Lewis, and on April 26, 1945 Roland was promote to the rank of Tech 5. While he was at Ft. Lewis, his son, Roland S. Epps, Jr. was born on January 19, 1945, who happened to be the first grandchild of Peter and Eva Epps.

Roland was granted a furlough from May 3, 1945 until May 28, 1945. He came home while on that furlough and was able to see his son before returning to Ft. Lewis. His sister, Vivian, also recalled that while Roland was home on leave their mother, Eva, cooked a sweet potato pudding just for him and he ate it all because it was his favorite dessert.



*The picture above of Roland's unit was taken at Fort Lewis, Washington, probably taken in April 1945.  
Roland is second from the right on the front row.*

After returning from the furlough, Roland's unit, the 3161<sup>st</sup> Engineer Firefighting Platoon, left San Francisco on June 28, 1945, for the Philippines, arriving on there August 2, 1945. Some military action was still ongoing in that area then, however Japan surrendered shortly afterwards on August 14, 1945. Roland's unit next left from San Fabian, Philippines on September 27, 1945, destined for Japan, almost a year to the day from when he was inducted, as part of the American occupation forces. Juanitha and Roland's family must have felt that he would safely return home after Japan surrendered.

Roland's unit was part of the U.S. Army that was in post-war occupation there for the reconstruction of Japan. They arrived in Nagoya, Japan, located on the Pacific Coast in central Japan, on October 26, 1945. While at Nagoya, Roland was promoted again, this time to the rank of Sergeant on December 12, 1945, thus was possibly one of the senior Non-Commissioned Officers in charge of the enlisted men in his platoon.

Roland's unit was serving at Sumitomo Light Metals Co, Haniwara Branch of Nagoya, when at about 1:00 am on the morning of Sunday, February 10, 1946, a fire was accidentally started by a person on night patrol trying to light an oil burning heater in the room where Roland was sleeping. All others in the building at the time, some who were still awake, escaped the building, but Roland was unable to escape from his room and all efforts to rescue him failed.

The Commanding Officer of Roland's unit, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Lloyd A. Wooldridge, Jr., sent a letter to Juanitha Epps on February 13, 2016, informing her of Roland's death. In that letter Lt. Wooldridge wrote in part:

*"...as his Commanding Officer, and one who has been associated with him since March 1945, I hope you will find some condolence in the fact that he was appreciated by the men under his command, as well as myself, as a soldier and a leader. Therefore his death to us was a loss indeed and we all share this tragedy with you."*

Lt. Wooldridge went on to say in his letter:

*"Sergeant Roland S. Epps, performed a wonderful job in the service of his country. He fought for the things which he believed in as so many men have done."*

In addition to Lt. Wooldridge, a letter of sympathy was sent to Juanitha on February 16, 1946, by Major General Edward F. Witsell, The Adjutant General of the Army in which he said:

*"I sincerely regret that this message must carry so much sorrow into your home and I hope that in time you may find sustaining comfort in knowing that he served his country honorably."*

In accordance with his religious designation in his military records, Roland was given a Christian burial in the U.S. Army Cemetery at Yokohama, Japan. This cemetery was used for American soldiers that had died either as prisoners of war or during the post-war Allied Occupation of Japan until arrangements could be made for the return of their remains to the United States. Due to the large number of American WWII casualties, the process of exhuming and returning the remains of the American soldiers was a slow procedure.

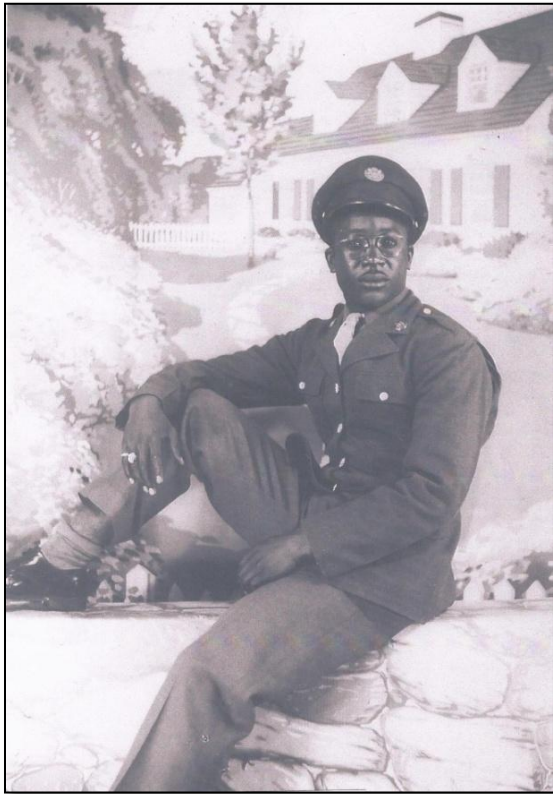
It was almost three years later, on Saturday, December 18, 1948, when Roland's remains arrived in Burrowsville at the John Elliott Funeral Home. His reburial service was conducted by the Reverend J.J.E. Horne on Sunday, December 19, 1948, at the Morning Star Baptist Church Cemetery in Burrowsville, Virginia. His reburial was with full military honors, including a rifle squad salute and bugler from Camp Lee (now Fort Lee). His son, Roland S. Epps, Jr., would turn four years old just one month later. At the time of his reburial, Juanitha selected an upright marble headstone issued by the United States government as Roland's cemetery marker. Later on his family had a flat granite slab placed over his grave adjacent to the upright military headstone, as shown at the end of this biography.

In memory of Roland, his name is inscribed on the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia and on the War Memorial Monument at the Prince George Regional Heritage Center at Prince George, Virginia. In addition, Roland is listed in the book *Gold Star Honor Roll of Virginia in the Second World War* and was awarded the service medals listed below.

- Good Conduct Medal
- Asiatic Pacific Ribbon
- Philippine Liberation Ribbon
- WWII Victory Medal

At the time of Roland's death, he was survived by his wife, Juanitha, his son, Roland S. Epps, Jr., his parents, as well as all of his brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, since then and before this biography was prepared, his son passed away on June 26, 1994, and Juanitha passed away on September 19, 2015. In addition to his parents, all of his brothers and sisters have also passed away as of November 2016.

The collection of information, mementos and pictures included in this document were provided by and are preserved by his niece, Julia W. Miles, who continues to cherish his memory along with many other nieces and nephews.



*Roland's Military Portrait*

### Reburial Rites Held For Sgt. R. S. Epps

BURROWSVILLE, Va. — Reburial services for Sgt. Roland Sylvester Epps were held here Dec. 19. The remains of Sgt. Epps arrived in Burrowsville, Dec. 18, from overseas. The graveside rites were administered by a firing squad and bugler from Camp Lee, Va. Interment followed in the Morning Star Church Cemetery. Sgt. Epps



**SGT. EPPS** is survived by his widow, Mrs. Juanitha Wynn Epps; one son, Roland S. Epps Jr.; his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Epps; four brothers, Norman, Daniel, Calvin and Delano Epps; five sisters, Misses Theresa, Olga, Lionell, Wanza and Lillian Epps, all of Burrowsville; two aunts, Mrs. Lillian Hatchett and Mrs. Thelma Spivey of Norfolk; and four uncles, Richard and Bert Banks and Chris Epps of Norfolk and Russell Banks of Washington, D. C.

*1948 Newspaper Notice about Roland's Reburial at the Morning Start Baptist Church Cemetery*

Letter from Lt. Lloyd A. Wooldridge, Roland's Commanding Officer, dated February 13, 1946,  
informing Juanitha of the death of her husband Sgt. Roland S. Epps

Letter of Condolence to  
the family of Sergeant  
Roland S. Epps, ASN  
HEADQUARTERS 3161st ENGINEER FIRE FIGHTING PLATOON Lt Plat, APO 713,  
APO 711, NAGOYA, HONSHU I., JAPAN USA

13 February 1946

TO: Mrs. Juanita S. Epps  
Route 2, Box 1  
Spring Grove, Va.

My Dear Mrs Epps:

It is with regret that I write you this letter concerning the death of your husband, Sergeant Roland S. Epps. However, as his Commanding Officer, and one who has been associated with him since March of 1945, I hope that you will find some condolence in the fact that he was appreciated by the men under his command, as well as myself, as a soldier and a leader.

Therefore his death to us was a loss indeed, and we all share this tragedy with you.

Sergeant Epps died as a result of being trapped in a fire at Sumitomo Light Metals Mf. Co., Marisawa Branch, of Nagoya, Japan at about one o'clock on the morning of February tenth.

He will be given a Christian burial, with all respects shown, at Yokohama, Japan.

Sergeant Roland S. Epps, performed a wonderful job in the service of his country. He fought for the things which he believed in as so many men have done.

Hoping that you will find some fact of relief in these words, I remain,

LLOYD A. WOOLDRIDGE JR  
1st Lt., CE  
Commanding

**Virginia War Memorial, Richmond, Virginia and Roland's Inscription on the Glass Wall**



★ ROLAND S. EPPS

**Prince George County War Memorial and Roland's Inscription at the Historic Prince George Courthouse**



ROLAND S. EPPS





***Final Resting Place***

***Morning Star Baptist Church Cemetery***

***Burrowsville, Virginia***

This memorial tribute made possible by support of:

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***Special thanks is extended to the Morning Star Baptist Church of Burrowsville, Virginia  
for sponsoring acquisition of the military records for Roland S. Epps, Sr.***

Prepared November 2016 by

The Prince George Regional Heritage Center

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