



## 853rd Engineer Battalion Aviation

### Private First Class Jack Wheaton

Jack Wheaton, a son of William and Emma Staples Wheaton, was born on May 21, 1921, in Ogden, Utah. His family moved to Coalville where he attended North Summit High School. He worked at T. E. Moore Motor Company until he entered the Army Air Corp on January 14, 1943. He received training at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, Dyersburg, Tennessee, and Mobile Alabama.

He was assigned to the 853rd Engineer Battalion Aviation. Aviation battalions were trained to build heavy duty air bases in forward areas along with related facilities. Their equipment would include tractors, bulldozers, scrapers, and other equipment necessary to meet the construction needs in any type of environment.

After his training, the 853rd Battalion was ordered to North Africa. After a short period of time, it was ordered to go to India via the Suez Canal. He boarded the HMT Rohna, a troop transfer ship, with the 332nd Fighter Control Squadron, 31st Signal Construction Battalion, 444th Portable Surgical Hospital, 2 AAF Fillers, 1 Ground Fillers, and one infantry ASF fillers.

As the convoy moved toward the Suez Canal, it was attacked by German aircraft. Some of the air craft were fitted with radio-controlled glide-bombs that carried a 500 kg explosive war head and were propelled by a rocket motor. The Rohna was hit by a Henschel HS 239A radio-guided glide bomb which caused heavy damage to it and resulted in the loss of 1,180 dead. Some 1,050 were U.S. troops. It was the largest loss of troops being transported by sea in World War II. The number of troops lost was held secret for many years and was not released until the military was forced to release the records.

Pfc. Jack Wheaton died of injuries on November 26, 1943. At the time of his death, he was survived by his mother; two brothers; William O. Wheaton, Frank Wheaton; and five sisters, Mrs. John Hampton (Dorothy), Mrs. Frank Moore (Athaleene), Mrs. Clyde Salmon (Ellen), Mrs. Robert Piercy (Betty), and Mrs. Glen Blonquist (Barbera). He was buried in North Africa and his body was shipped home and he was buried on March 13, 1949, in the Coalville cemetery. He was preceded in death by his father and his sister Majorie Wheaton Bedell.