

## **LTC Clement C. VanWagoner**

Colonel VanWagoner was born 4 March 1914, in rural Alpena County and lived most of his youth in neighboring Alcona County. In February of 1941, while living in the Detroit area, he received his Army induction notice. He reported to Camp Custer, Battle Creek Michigan, as a private. He quickly rose to the rank of Sergeant, and was therefore selected for OCS (Officer Candidate School) at Ft. Benning, Georgia in 1942. Upon completion of OCS he was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, as a platoon leader in C Company 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. He saw his first combat action in November of 1942 during Operation Torch, the allied invasion of North Africa. VanWagoner was promoted to 1LT in January of 1943. He was next involved in the invasion of Sicily as the Company Executive Officer, during this campaign he was awarded the Soldiers Medal for rescuing all the company's ammunition from a burning jeep. VanWagoner was in three separate campaigns in North Africa and Sicily before the entire Division was sent back to England. While in England the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division conducted numerous classes and trained extensively in preparation for Operation Overlord, more commonly known as the D-day invasion of France. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division landed on Omaha beach, 6 June 1944 as part of the allied Normandy Invasion. During the intense fighting that ensued, VanWagoner was fortunate in that he was not wounded. On 4 December 1944 while assigned as Commander of A Company VanWagoner was promoted to Captain. In February of 1945 VanWagoner was seriously wounded in an artillery barrage where upon he was medivaced to England for numerous surgeries. Although having more than enough points to go home, he demanded to return to his men and unit, and did so in May of 1945. At the conclusion of his tour of duty VanWagoner had seen more than 600 days of combat, some of his decorations include: Combat Infantry Badge, four Silver Star Medals, seven Bronze Star Medals with the V device for Valor, five Purple Heart Medals (although only 3 are included in the official 201 file) and the Soldier's Medal. In addition to his numerous American Decorations, Captain VanWagoner received the Belgian Order of Leopold, the Belgian Croix de Guerre, the French Croix de Guerre, and the French Fourragere. At wars end, of the 1800 officers originally assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, VanWagoner was one of 32 survivors still assigned to the Division. VanWagoner returned state side in 1945 where upon he left Army active duty. In 1947 he was requested by Michigan's Adjutant General to reorganize (and thence command) the Michigan Army National Guard unit in Alpena. Upon FR (Federal Recognition) the unit in Alpena became B Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 125<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 46<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He served as Company Commander for 7 years and thereafter went on to other assignments and commands within the guard, until his retirement in 1967 as Lieutenant Colonel.