

# DIABOL



Voice Of The Family And Friends Of The 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment Association- November 2007 - Vol. 2, Nr. 3

## Birmingham Reunion – Successful & Fun

*New Association's First Reunion Marks a Growing Hope*

### From The Jumpmaster

By Dick O'Donnell



Undoubtedly the fiscal year highlight was the highly successful First Annual Reunion of the Family and Friends of the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR Association.

Held in Birmingham, AL and hosted by Joyce and Johnny Johnson (HQ 1<sup>st</sup>), the event ran from Aug 8<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup>.



Banquet speaker and Jet test-pilot Russell O'Quinn [L], poses with host Johnny Johnson

Nearly 70 veterans, family members and friends attended and represented a wide geographic diversity. Veteran Dan Furlong hiked in from Alaska while "Bobby" Feuillye winged in from France. Other attendees represented states from throughout the U.S.

As part of the celebration, two sticks of parachutists punctuated the skies over the grassy esplanade of the American Village. Members of the WW-II Airborne Demonstration Team (ADT) leaped out of the Bluebonnet Belle, a C-47 flown in from Texas by the Confederate Air Force just for the event.

Also on the agenda was a meal at the Fish Market and a tour of the Southern

Museum of Flight with its static displays of aircraft and memorabilia. A fine BBQ lunch was enjoyed at the museum.

The 2008 reunion, to be hosted by none other than the great CSM Rock Merritt, will be held at Ft. Bragg, Fayetteville, NC. Specific dates are to be announced when the current 508<sup>th</sup> rotates back to the States from Afghanistan.

A lot of business was discussed one afternoon with too many details to discuss here but one item of interest is the opening of the association to all 508ers regardless of the years they served.



Red Devils with Airborne Demonstration Team.

### PRES SEZ

Hello.

My name is Troy Palmer; my father was Lawrence "Larry" Palmer, SSGT HQ1st.

I was involved with the 508th PIR Association for approximately 13 years. I hosted two reunions and helped my parents with a third. Following the retirement of the old 508 PIR Association, Dick O'Donnell - 508PIR.org webmaster began to form a

new Association. I am excited to be a part of the board and be elected the first president of the Family & Friends of the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR. As a member I hope to have the opportunity to learn more about my dad and his fellow "Red Devils".

To encourage more involvement with our members, the Board of Directors built into the Bylaws, Article V that "a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Clerk and such other officers as the BoD or the members may determine" are to be elected. These offices were filled by various nominees when we met in Birmingham. While the positions are set for now, please think about what this association means to you. It is where we will need help in the coming years as our association continues. It is pivotal that people get involved; if not as an officer then consider hosting a reunion. Pay your dues and let's keep the 508<sup>th</sup> alive.

Look forward to meeting many of you at the 2008 reunion.

Troy



New President with wife Donna & Son Rob. Rob's uniform is for a cadet at the Citadel.

*All photos by Ellen Peters*

## Association Growth

As many of you already know, the association has a recruitment committee. Spearheaded by Jan Silver, the team is rounded out with Liz Farrell, Gene Garren, Ellen Peters and Joan Shanley. The group has been busily contacting all members of the former association to ensure they are aware of the new one.

Net result? The association ranks have swelled to over 230 members, including 109 WW-II veterans. And the recruiters are not finished with their list as yet!

Great job, team! ➔

## Wollaton Treasures

An interesting tidbit has come to light at Nottingham's Wollaton Park ... and there may be other things soon seeing the light of day as well.

During his visit to Nottingham in June 2007, Jimmy Wynne (HQ 1<sup>st</sup>) and his host Graham Lawson met with Wollaton's manager, Vicky Martin.

England has a popular TV series called "Time Team" that delves into historic topics. The film crew wants to explore the grounds of Wollaton Park, site of the 508<sup>th</sup> "Tent City" in an effort to locate buried artifacts.

Besides items that may have been lost during that period, e.g., coins and other small bits, Jimmy Wynne confirmed that some men did bury things for safe keeping before heading off to Normandy. It is entirely possible that some of these men never returned to reclaim their goods. Who knows what relics they have inadvertently left behind for posterity.

No filming schedule has been set as yet but we will let you know what transpires.

## TAPS

### Don L. Dicks

Don Dicks, Sergeant Major (ret.) took his final jump on September 7, 2007. A military funeral was held at Ft. Riley, KS on September 13, 2007. This well-known and much loved member of the original 508<sup>th</sup> was an ever-present standout at reunions and tours. He will be well remembered and sorely missed. Martin-Becker-Carlson Funeral Home, Abilene, KS handled the arrangements. Memorial

donations may be made to a Shiner's Hospital.

### Wahto, Gordon William

Gordon W. Wahto, 84, died Jan. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007. He was a lifelong Alaskan and his passing occurred at Providence Alaska Medical Center.

As a former Airborne trooper in the 508<sup>th</sup>, Company A, his graveside service was conducted with military honors at Fort Richardson National Cemetery. Wahto jumped into Normandy and Holland and fought in all four major battles. After the Battle of the Bulge he was given a field commission. Pride in his unit was evident as Wahto was a lifetime member of the C-47 Organization and the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment Association. After his wartime service he also served in the Alaska Territorial Guard while holding a civilian job

He is survived by his wife Joan, son David, daughters Susan & Cody, and four grandchildren. ➔

## Condolences



### Betty JoAnn "Jody" Bratvold

Many will remember Jody as an energetic person who was always at the hospitality suite or registration desk.

Jody passed away on the October 3, 2007 at Rancho Vista Care in Vista, California.

Jody worked in food service most of her life and was an excellent cook; often for large crowds at her home in Tacna Arizona, where she lived since 1975.

Jody is survived by her husband Arnold Bratvold (H Co); sons Jack Stover, Jerry (Gwynne) Bratvold, Joey Bratvold and daughter Jane Duffield.

Jody was loved by many and will deeply be missed by all.

### Stumpner, Helen F.

Helen Frances Stumpner, 94, of Loyal, Wisconsin died Sept. 26, 2007, at Chippewa Manor Nursing Home.

Services were held at 11 a.m. Oct. 1, 2007, at St. Anthony's Catholic

Church in Loyal. Burial was in the Loyal Lutheran Cemetery.

She was born July 9, 1913, in Menasha to Paul and Frances (Cherney) Daum. She was the sister of Pvt John A. Daum, a member of B Company, KIA in Normandy, June 8 '44. She married Arnold Stumpner on Nov. 14, 1935. He predeceased her on Feb. 18, 1990. They moved to Loyal in Oct. 1936 to take over the operation of her husband's family farm. They lived on the farm until Aug. 1977 when they moved into Loyal. ➔

## From the Crewmember

By Leland Burns - editor

**Heroes are everywhere I go.** Let me throw in a warning first; this is no Airborne story. But stay tuned anyway. My Uncle Dan Dyess (remember his last name) passed away recently at age 80. He was really a cousin, my mother's 1<sup>st</sup> cousin, but I always saw him as an uncle. 30 days prior to his death I took mom to see him again before cancer ended his life. We really had a great visit and he appeared stronger than we were expecting. At one point he thanked me for bringing dad's memories in the 508<sup>th</sup> to print and then pointed to a book-case claiming, "My three favorite books are on the second shelf, far right side."

One book was dad's story wedged between two biographies of other WWII soldiers. One was titled *The Dyess Story: The Complete Eye-Witness Account of the Death March From Bataan*.

"Wow, I'm guessing there is a relationship." I said. Uncle Dan nodded but said the blood line was thin.

Lt. Col. William Dyess had kept his squadron of P-40s flying even after McArthur left him in the Philippines. After the fuel was gone Dyess formed his pilots into an infantry raiding party. They only surrendered after the bullets ran out. He and 18 men under his command, lived through the Bataan Death March, and after a year of imprisonment he escaped and found his way back to friendly forces.

America offered to let him return to civilian life or take a desk job but as long as the war continued William Dyess insisted on fighting it.

He took another command and began the final training of pilots in a new squadron. While on a routine training flight the Colonel's plane caught fire. His fellow pilots told him to bail out but the planes were over a populated area and Dyess refused. Instead he flew to a vacant field where the plane could be set down without bringing any harm to others. William Dyess was able to do that at the cost of his own life. This occasion was his 2<sup>nd</sup> DSC/Flying Cross. Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas is named after this distant cousin to my Uncle Dan.

"I never knew him, but Jimmie did," came my uncle's voice.

"Who's Jimmie?" I asked and I was directed to the third book on the shelf.

*A Hero Among Heroes: Jimmie Dyess and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division.*

"Is this another cousin?" I enquired. Uncle Dan nodded again and told me he was a third cousin. "He was the famous one." I cracked open the book wondering how anyone could top having an air-base named after them.

Dan had played with Jimmie as a child but Jimmie Dyess was a good 8 years older so the interaction between these two was limited. Jimmie, an Eagle Scout was 19 years of age and attending Clemson University when his fearless nature was first discovered. While visiting the coast of South Carolina a squall arose and two women were in trouble. The waves were carrying them out to sea and they could not swim back against the tide. A few men had tried to reach them but had given up.

When Dyess showed he decided he could not let them perish. As the only one willing to try again he slowly reached them and painfully swam them back to shore. For his selfless action that day he was awarded the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Heroism, the civilian equivalent to the Medal of Honor.

That's pretty good for anyone but the story doesn't end there. 16 years later James Dyess, like his cousin William was a Lt. Colonel in the military. His command was in the Marines. After the rescue of four soldiers behind enemy lines the commander on the next day led his

battalion from the front. Facing a determined enemy Colonel Dyess would rush to high ground up front where he stood in the face of bullets so as to direct his attacking men. He repeated this three times and at the end, in the final clean-up action, he was shot and killed. For his daring command at the front Marine Lieutenant Colonel Dyess earned the Nation's highest honor - the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Returning the book to its place I felt a bit overwhelmed, two huge heroes from one family tree. "I can see the family resemblance," I mentioned. "They both look like Lamar" (Dan's brother).

In 1945 the navy destroyer DD-880 was designated the USS Dyess. In 1998 the Naval & Marine Corps Reserve Center in Augusta, Ga. was also dedicated to the memory of LTC A. James Dyess, USMCR.

Uncle Dan was a great kidder and wonderful story teller. He could play very creative practical jokes on you so any time you had a chance to get a dig in on him you better take it.

"Well," I kidded him, "with all this distinguished service what happened to your side of the family tree?"

Always quick of wit and although cancer had all but taken his life he answered without giving it much thought.

"Bagworms." He claimed.

*My Uncle served in the U.S. Navy from '45-'47.*

*Leland*

## LETTERS TO THE DIABLO

All,

Mark Slootjes runs the website [www.dday-veday.nl](http://www.dday-veday.nl).

He has been to Normandy and has a page dedicated to the jumps made there. Although his report is not ready yet, there are pictures in place already. The pictures were made at the last jump of the Liberty Jump Team in Normandy - 2007.

Thanks,

Met vriendelijke groet,

Anton van Ensbergen

Member of the *Liberty Jump Team*

*The Liberty Jump Team (LJT) and the ADT group that jumped at the reunion both do an outstanding job of representing the Airborne of WWII jumping out of select C-47 aircraft. The Diablo Editor had the enjoyment of an invitation to visit and speak briefly to a training session with the LJT. Since then I have returned to their "base" airport in Oklahoma for an exciting show by the Tulsa Military Vehicle Association. Enough planes, tanks, jeeps and trucks to start an invasion. Membership in the LJT is free to all WWII Airborne Paratroopers. You can check out the Liberty Jump Team at -*

[www.libertyjumpteam.org](http://www.libertyjumpteam.org)

and their physical address is -  
1515 Mount Gilead Rd.

Roanoke, TX 76262

*The Airborne Demonstration Team's web site is - [www.wviiadt.org](http://www.wviiadt.org)*

*Leland*

### DVD AVAILABLE OF DEDICATION CEREMONY FOR 508TH PIR MONUMENT AT GRAND SART, BELGIUM

The brother of a local official in Vielsalm, Belgium has made a DVD from his filming of the 1995 dedication ceremony at the 508th PIR Monument at Grand Sart, Belgium (near Vielsalm), where the unit saw action during the Battle of the Bulge. The DVD shows the ceremony, close-ups of the monument, and scenes of the countryside in the surrounding area where fighting took place. He is now working on a second DVD. He wants to make the DVDs available to veterans who attended the ceremony. Copies will be made when we know how many to order, so it will take some time before they are mailed. If you would like to receive the DVDs, send your name and address to:

Robert Hasbrouck

83 Acorn Drive

Summit, NJ 07901-4153, or,

[rwh-ash@comcast.net](mailto:rwh-ash@comcast.net)

*Do you have info to share with the regiment, history to record, or a favorite war story to retell? Letters to the*

*Editor are encouraged!*

*Leland* ✈

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## Newsletter Distribution

During a Board meeting held in Birmingham it was reported that the newsletter postal distribution expenses were more than \$1,300 per year and represented a major drain on our treasury. It was also recognized that a large number of individuals were receiving the newsletter as a first year introductory gesture. Many of them have not yet joined the association and thereby were not helping the organization maintain fiscal viability.

As a consequence, it was decided that a new policy needed to be implemented in regard to newsletter distribution.

After discussion on the above, it was decided that beginning with Fiscal 2008 (November 2007 - October 2008), the following newsletter distribution policy would be put into effect: Those receiving the newsletter, whether by post or by e-mail, would only be WW-II veterans (paid or unpaid) and paid members, whether family or friend.

Notice of this change of policy is now served. Everyone is encouraged to become paid members. If you haven't paid your dues this may be the last issue of the DIABLO and this includes both postal and electronic distribution. ➔

## New Fiscal Year Dawns

Based on our adopted By-Laws, the association's fiscal year runs from November 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup> –

This means – in the friendliest way possible - that dues for the new year are due November 1. The \$10 annual dues are on a “per household” basis.

Please send your personal check, made payable to “**FAF of the 508th PIR**”. to the Treasurer:

**Ellen Peters, Treasurer**  
 3630 Townsend Drive  
 Dallas, TX 75229

Phone: (214) 352-7002

## Keep 'Em Coming

If you recently changed your postal or e-mail address, please ensure that we can reach you by sending a change notice to the treasurer (see above) which will allow us to update our records and get your Diablo to you. ➔



*Otto Langhurst displays the beautiful jacket he wore to the Birmingham Reunion.*

*Photo by Ellen Peters*



### The Diablo

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