

DIABLO



Voice Of The Family And Friends Of The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association- February 2008 - Vol. 3, Nr. 1

Friends and Family Reunion Set For Fort Bragg

Association to Gather With 508th Returning From Afghanistan



From The Jumpmaster

By Dick O'Donnell

The Friends and Family of 508th is experiencing wonderful growth. At this writing the Association is 314 members strong and 148 of those are WW-II veterans. The F&F Association is intended for all veterans of the 508th from 1942 to present day as well as their families and any bona fide friends or interested parties.

Our web site (www.508PIR.org) is one of the busiest sites covering Airborne history. I want to encourage all the membership to continue to reach out to others.

Also let's keep the history coming in by sending submissions to either the web site or by letters to the Diablo editor. All the details of the regiment's action need to be covered as best we can. Anyone with old letters or photographs is encouraged to share those with the rest of us. Originals will be returned.

The Sun City Fiesta to be held in El Paso, Texas is still looking good for our 2009 reunion but it is not too early for folks to think about hosting 2010. Please consider taking on this duty. We need to keep the show spread around at different city locations across America.



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Reunion 2008!

Rock Merritt has announced that he, Jim Smith and Woody Wodowski will sponsor the 508th PIR WW II reunion on October 14th-18th 2008 celebrating the 66th anniversary of the 508th activation. The reunion will be held in the Fort Bragg and Fayetteville area at the Holiday Inn Bordeaux Motel. All members of the Family and Friends of the 508th PIR plus members of the former 508th Association are welcome. Final details will be published three to four months prior to the reunion. Let us make this a special day in the history of the 508th. Our active duty 508ers will have returned from 15 months of duty in Afghanistan and we will have a chance to mingle and talk with these fine troopers on our day with the 508th at Fort Bragg. So mark your calendar, 14-18th October 2008. Don't make Rock have to chase you down!

From The Crewmember

By Leland Burns - editor

The following is the beginning action of 1st Lt. Hal Martin on D-day.

About 10 minutes from the DZ the XO of F Company stood up and told his stick to check their helmets, that all chin straps were secure, "You might need them when we get to the ground." It was a small piece of humor, unusual from the lieutenant whose reputation was strictly by the book and an officer that did not goof around – ever. He walked the aisle one time in a last effort to say good luck, or maybe goodbye. But the greeting was done in silence and eye contact was difficult in the dark. Then came the most famous command in Airborne – to stand up and hook up. He went through his mental list just like a practice jump by shouting out all the normal checks. And then he took his position at the door just moments before the red light came on. Red,

as in the light of hell, because that is what the plane started catching almost immediately.

Trying to find something recognizable from his study of photos and a sand table, his only reward was machinegun fire from the ground. Tracers looked to be coming straight at them. He turned to his communication man, Sgt. Ed Chatoian.

"It looks as though the Jerries have a nice reception, all waiting for us."

Sgt. Chatoian agreed. "Sure the hell does, this is one time we are going to earn that extra jump pay."

The lieutenant was not nervous but did not know the reason why because everything was coming up at them except the kitchen sink. At any moment he thought a machinegun would catch the plane and kill half of his men. The closer the plane flew in, the more stuff that came up. Finally, on getting a green light, Lt. Martin happily jumped from his "crate." He didn't feel the opening shock. Behind him his men were following but luck ran out and one man was hit at the door, fell, and blocked the exit. Others took hold of him and had to push him out in order to continue.

As Martin reached the ground he realized he would be landing in the trees so he crossed his legs to prevent straddling a limb. He touched down at the fork of a tree and fell backwards. The fork of the tree caught him by his ankles and he hung upside down. Pain from his right knee sent a signal that he feared meant he had trained for nearly two years only to bung up a leg and be unable to continue. However he was able to pull himself up and on dropping to Mother Earth found he could still walk. At touching real ground but falling within thick brush he took his trench knife and cut all his harnesses. He wasn't going to waste time unbuckling anything.

Upon freedom from his parachute the young officer crawled out of the brush to see if he could round up his men. Just as he moved to the opening a group of three planes came overhead. No sooner than on looking up one of the planes took a fatal hit of ack-ack and burst into flames. It crashed almost immediately. If the troopers hadn't jumped it was beyond late for them. None had a chance; none would be coming out alive.

Moving along the hedge he had just exited he tried lurking in the shadows. Then he saw a figure coming towards him. Whoever it was must have seen him as well because both shadowy figures hit the dirt in unison. He waited for what seemed an eternity. Finally he became convinced that it must be one of the men from his stick so he crawled forward ten yards and gave the challenge.

Recognizing the voice of Sgt. Ed Chatoian he rose and called him. The sergeant got up.

"Gee lieutenant, I came pretty close to letting you have it."

Martin responded, "Hell, Ed, that only makes us even. I was going to do the same to you."

Before dawn the commanding officer of F Company. Capt. Flanders, would be captured and later killed by friendly fire from an Allied aircraft. This effectively placed 1st Lt. Hal Martin in charge of the company. But within hours Martin, fighting with Lt. Goodale and 25 men, would suffer several wounds. The injuries came when the group withdrew from heavy fire as Martin and two men covered. The three became cut off. The two men were killed. Martin finally made a run for it and became one of the many injured on Hill 30.



MAIL BOX

Congratulations!

Joshua French (grandson of Bob Speers – Hq. 2nd) got married in Dallas, TX on New Years Eve to Caroline Presley. Some troopers might remember Josh from the 2004 STATIC LINE trip. The happy couple is setting their new home in Jacksonville, FL.

All,

I do enjoy reading the Diablo—(my father is Edward F. Wenzel – Co. F – Red Devils) – we enjoyed attending the reunions with him for many years. His health has been poor, so he doesn't travel as much. Anyway, my point is, my husband and I have moved, and I wanted to give you our new address:

OLD ADDRESS:
3303 Spring Court
North Tonawanda, NY 14120

NEW ADDRESS:
7176 Creekbend Dr.
Pendleton, NY 14120

Thank you and have a wonderful holiday season.

Terrie Levatino

Sirs,

I am writing in behalf of my father: Laverne Peterson of 10265 Timber Ridge Road, Cambridge, Illinois 61238

In the November 2007 Issue of DIABLO on page 4 there was a man called Otto Langhurst with a beautiful jacket. This was my fathers regiment in the 82nd Airborne and he jumped D-day in Normandy. He would very much like to order one of these jackets and would like to know where he may do so. You can e-mail me back with any information it would be very helpful.

Thank You,
Barb Van De Veire
10016 N. 1000th Ave
Cambridge, Illinois 61238
E-mail: bradbarb@theinter.com

Otto, here's your chance to cash in! Ed.



Newsletter Distribution

All paid-up members of the Family and Friends receive this newsletter. Total postage for each quarterly newsletter edition is approximately \$500 and that doesn't include the cost of printing the items to be mailed. Membership is important. Annual dues are only \$10 and donations are welcomed as well.

Use of e-mail is an effective cost cutting mechanism. The newsletter can be attached in either Microsoft's Word or Adobe's PDF formats – or both.

If you are willing to receive the Diablo via e-mail please drop a line to jumpmaster@508PIR.org.

Hard copies will continue to be delivered to physical addresses as long as the member remains active. If you are reading this by way of email – Thank you.



Final Jumps

Bagdonas,

Frank Bagdonas Sr., 85, of Ashland, PA passed away October 29th 2007 at Lehigh Valley Hospital, Allentown. He was a veteran of Normandy jumping with the 508 on D-Day where he was wounded by shrapnel and awarded the Purple Heart. He recovered and also made the combat jump into Holland and saw action in the Battle of the Bulge. He went with the 508 to Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, after VE Day when the regiment was selected as Honor Guard to General Eisenhower at SHEAF Headquarters.

Frank was a member of St. Mauritius Church and American Legion, both of Ashland. He was preceded in death by his wife, Mary C. Kenenitz, in 1990.

Dicks

One of the great sergeants of 508th history died Sept. 7th 2007. Don L. Dicks made the army his career for 22 years and became a CSM; but he went on to serve his country as a Municipal Court Judge in Enterprise Kansas for 12 years after retiring to that area. Don married in 1946 to the former Marjorie J. Hatfield. Marjorie preceded him in death on December 24th 1999.

Monchek

Frank "Fargo" Monchek, Jr made his Final Jump on Monday, March 19th, 2007 after a valiant battle with lung cancer. He was 3 weeks shy of his 88th birthday. He leaves behind Emily ("Mimi"), his dear wife of 65 years, sons Francis and Thomas, and daughter Jean (Brian) Hiller. Frank was a member of the 508th P.I.R., 82nd Airborne, "C" Company. In civilian life, Frank was

employed by and retired from the Jos. Schlitz Brewing Company after 34 years of service. He was an avid Milwaukee Brewers fan, and enjoyed playing dartball at the nearby senior center. Frank was a cardiac-care alumni of St. Michael's Sports Rehab clinic and seldom missed his daily early-morning cardio-workouts.

Condolences may be sent to:
Emily Monchek
8714 W. Dogwood St.
Milwaukee, WI 53224

Or Jean Hiller (daughter)
N99 W14677 Amber Drive
Germantown, WI 53022
Ph. 262-250-0642

Springer

Sirs - My father Chuck Springer Sr. very proudly served in the 82nd Airborne during WWII, with the 508 Regiment. Sadly he passed away April 10, 2007. We had a military funeral I know he would have been proud of. Many of his brothers-in-arms were there and he was sent off with a 21 gun salute. The Detroit Chapter did a wonderful job in helping our family with all the plans. I know Dad was happy!

So, I just wanted his entire 508th Regiment to know that Dad proudly talked of you all and I wanted you to know of his death!

Thank You,
Cynthia Springer

Warnecke

Adolph F. "Bud" Warnecke, originally of Co. B, passed away Sept. 23rd 2007. This Purple Heart recipient was living in Fayetteville at the time of his death. After Normandy Bud received a Battlefield Commission and was reassigned to Co. E. He was also a veteran of the Korean War retiring after 26 years of military service as a Lt. Colonel. His beloved wife Cee Cee preceded him in death in 1996.

Still

Wilford A. Still took his Final Jump on January 12, 2008. Wilford was from Chambersburg, PA and had been a member of Regimental HQ Company.

Bennett

Late news of A Company's one-time 1st Sgt. Roy Bennett, has reached us as well. Sgt

Bennett, 66, of Dayton, OH made his departure in July 1976.

Jackson

Also arriving is the late news of the death of Willis Carl Jackson. In 1978 Mr. Jackson successfully sailed solo from the U.S. to Scotland in his boat the "Carla Mia". Upon returning to the States, Jackson received a heroic homecoming and later recounted his experiences during the solo crossing in "The Log of the Carla Mia."

Three years later, in May 1981, the month of his 58th birthday, he set sail for a return voyage but was lost at sea. Specific date and circumstance of his demise are unknown. Wreckage of his boat was later found off the coast of Spain.



Get Well

Speers, Bob

After the wedding of his son in Dallas Bob Speers suffered a mild stroke and was recovering in a Kansas hospital. He is home now. Send any notes or cards to him there. The address is—

18816 Loxahatchee Rd.
Jupiter, FL 33458



Searching For ...

For our readers without email - any news you may have for the Searchers can be sent to the Diablo Editor if the address is not given or known. Ed.

Dear Sir/Madam

I wonder if the 508th veterans could help me. I live in Scotland, I am trying to find out about my biological father who served during WW II and was stationed in the UK up till September 1944.

I have been looking through the history of the 82nd PIR and I know many were furloughed in Edinburgh during the war years staying at the American Red Cross Service Club.

I came across your photograph(s) and wondered if my father's name ever popped up during conversations or if you were aware of his existence.

In September 1944 he was S/Sgt Gayle (sp?) Robinson or Robertson or something very similar, it is believed he came from PA

and was raised in an orphanage, worked as a miner before enlisting.

Any help you can give is greatly appreciated.

Kindest regards,
John Wastle
john_wastle@btinternet.com

S/Sgt James Joseph Caruso

Sir, my father has a Purple Heart ribbon along with the other ribbons he received but he is not listed on the 508th web site. His name is James Joseph Caruso. His final rank was SSgt. He jumped on D-day and was in Company F, I think. I have no idea about when or how his wound would have earned a Purple Heart. Is there anyone in the association who knows the details of this? Please contact me at my email account.

Thanks, Barry
bcpanhead@bellsouth.net

PFC Verniest

I am doing research on my father, PFC Julius Verniest. I came across your website from a Google search and learned my father served in the 508th and earned numerous medals including the Purple Heart and Combat Infantry Badge. Unfortunately, my father is now deceased and has been since 1986. Since then I graduated from SJSU in 1990 and earned a Commission in the US Navy and am now a CDR serving in VP-30, the P-3 Fleet Replacement Squadron. Your website has helped me learn more about my father's military service then he ever talked about when I was a child growing up and for that, I thank you. Father did jump in Normandy, but that's about all he disclosed as I was growing up. I later learned from one of my Uncles, he made the march from France, all the way into Germany and was shot. Any additional info you could provide or anyone of your unit members who may have known my father would be appreciated. I'd love to hear, as we say in the Navy, a Sea story or two. Thank you for your service!

V/r,
CDR John W. Verniest
U.S. NAVY
jcverniest@comcast.net

Captain Eugene Hetland

Roland Hetland would like to visit with any troopers who can share a story about his father. Capt. Hetland was the C.O. of E Company during Normandy.

Email: ron81047het@sbcglobal.net
Cell phone: 949-697-6786.



LOST AND FOUND

Lowell Stevens, a civilian worker at Fort Bragg, wrote, "... recently a worker on Fort Bragg found an old Series E Bond under a file cabinet when it was moved.

The 25-dollar Bond had the following information printed on its front: PLEAS R. BYRD, 508th INF 1-31-1966, RA-11308627, 589-761-1875.

Perhaps through your website you could contact this individual or someone who may know of his whereabouts and pass along this information to him.

We all realize that 25-dollars might not be very much today but it was a pretty good sum of money in 1966. Thank you for your time and consideration."

Dick O'Donnell has already contacted the post-war 508th organization and they indicate that no one by the name Pleas Byrd has ever been a member of their organization.

In addition, he checked the Social Security Death Benefit files and determined that only two men have been listed with that rather unusual name.

The older of the two people found was born in 1878 and is clearly not the man being sought.

But, the second man, with a Social Security card issued in Texas, was born in 1927 and could be the proper person. Unfortunately he died at age 40 and the files do not indicate where his demise took place.

If, however, the last set of numbers (589-761-1875) is the owner's social security number, it doesn't match with either of these two individuals.

The trail has grown cold since completing that bit of research and Internet searches on the name have yielded nothing further.

Anyone with information regarding Pleas Byrd can contact Mr. Stevens via e-mail at lowell.w.stevenssr@us.army.mil so that this

long-lost savings bond can be put into the proper hands.

We can't help but wonder how much additional interest that bond has accrued since its maturity.



Happy Birthday

It's hard to believe it but the 508th web site is a full five years old this month! Like they say, "time flies ..."

Since its founding there have been over 87,000 visitors to the home page.

In addition, countless visitations have been made directly to other elements of the site.

This occurs as various search engines point researchers to any of hundreds of subordinate pages containing items of interest based on their search terms.

If you haven't "Googled" something about the 508th, try it and see how many hits you get. You may be amazed at how many times our home site will be referenced as a consequence of your search. The search engines have amassed a large index of our material.



The Diablo

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