

Ralph V. Booth – Private to Sergeant

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Light Machine Gun Platoon from March 12, 1943 to November 24, 1945.

Ralph Booth was a courageous soldier, a respected leader, loyal comrade and a cherished friend. Ralph was a distinguished member of the “Greatest of the Greatest Generation.”

Ralph Booth died February 13, 1998. Donna, his beloved wife, and his WW II comrades provided information for this summary.

Ralph Booth was born November 3, 1922 in New Albion, NY. Like many children of the depression, Ralph left school in his teens to help support his family. He worked as a farmhand and then enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). In the CCC, he worked with road construction gangs and as a cook.

Ralph was honorably discharged from the CCC on June 10, 1941. His experience with the CCC and the disciplines he practiced enhanced his transition to military life and accomplishments therein.

Ralph enlisted in the Army on November 20, 1942. He completed basic infantry training, and volunteered for airborne training. Upon qualification as a parachutist, Ralph was sent to Camp Mackall, NC as a replacement for the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508th PIR). He was assigned to the Hq1 Light Machine Gun Platoon. During the following months, he participated in arduous infantry training, and hazardous parachute operations.

In December 1943, the 508th PIR left port in New York, joined a convoy, and sailed to Europe. Eleven days later, Ralph landed in Belfast, Ireland.

After orientations were conducted on local customs, “blackout” regulations and rationing, a training schedule was implemented. Mostly physical training to restore muscles lost during the sea voyage, and weapons firing. Finally, the 508th PIR moved to Nottingham, England. Almost immediately, a vigorous training schedule was implemented. It included several night parachute jumps and many field exercises. The little time the Hq1 men had available for recreation was spent in the City of Nottingham, a ten-minute walk from the 508th PIR encampment. Nottingham offered many attractions, numerous exciting pubs, many lively dance halls, and extremely friendly people.

A few months later, the 508th PIR moved to an airport and prepared for a combat mission. Many long hours were spent studying maps and replicas of the objective area, although no one knew where it was on the continent. Finally, the Hq1 men blackened their faces, bid farewell to their comrades, donned their equipment and boarded the planes. Then they were informed that the objective area was in Normandy.



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The flight across the English Channel was uneventful until the planes arrived at the coastline of France, then they flew into a combination of low flying clouds and German antiaircraft and machinegun fires.

The C-47 pilots had to take evasive action to avoid collisions and lost formation. Only the leading C-47s in each formation had electronics to home in on pathfinder's equipment, the remaining planes in the formation were expected to follow the lead plane. Consequently, when the C-47s scattered, many pilots could not find the designated drop area.

Some 508th PIR planes were shot down, and most of the planes dropped paratroopers and equipment bundles miles from their drop zone.

As a result of the disastrous drop, the 508th PIR was unable to assemble for many days.

The 508th PIR men wandered for days as individuals or in small groups, always fighting Germans, destroying facilities, and making their way to their objective and hopefully larger groups of Americans.

Despite the disastrous beginning, the 508th PIR eventually evolved into a war-fighting capable force and accomplished all of its missions.

On July 15, 1944 the 508th PIR survivors of the Normandy drop returned to a "heroes' welcome in Nottingham, England. They held memorial services for their comrades lost in Normandy, decorated heroes, welcomed replacements, and prepared for another combat mission.

On September 1, the 508th PIR was again in an airfield prepared to parachute into fields near Tournai, Belgium. But that jump and an alternate jump at Leige were cancelled when General Patton's troops overran the areas, and the regiment returned to Nottingham.

After another short stay in the Nottingham tent camp, the 508th PIR moved to the airfield. This drop was scheduled for Nijmegen, a city in the Netherlands.

After briefings, the men boarded C-47's and joined an armada of hundreds of planes carrying paratroopers or towing gliders from two American and one British airborne division.

On September 17, 1944, about 1300 hours, a sunny afternoon, Hq1 men dropped south of Nijmegen, Holland. As expected, German troops waited on the field. The Germans were quickly overcome or abandoned their positions. Within the hour Hq1 men had assembled and were marching toward their objectives.

All that night the First Battalion fought to capture the Nijmegen highway bridge over the Waal River. At dawn the battalion was ordered to return to the drop zone.

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German infantry with anti-aircraft guns had occupied the area and was waiting to destroy the gliders carrying the 82nd Airborne Division artillery and engineer equipment that was scheduled to arrive about noon.

A heroic frontal attack by the First Battalion killed, captured or routed the Germans and destroyed the anti-aircraft guns - the entire glider force landed safely.

Subsequently, Ralph Booth's squad was tasked to support Company A in an assault on the German occupied and heavily defended "Devils Hill" --the dominating terrain feature in the Nijmegen area.

Lawrence Fitzpatrick was awarded the Silver Star medal for his actions in the attack. Fitzpatrick says that Ralph Booth also should have received the Silver Star medal, as Ralph and he were side-by-side when he led the attack on Devil's Hill.

On November 11, 1944, the tired 508th PIR men marched 22 miles to OSS; Holland where they rendezvoused with vehicles that carried them to Sissonne, France. In Sissonne, the 508 lived in a French Artillery Post with warm rooms, hot food, mail, and no training.

Everyone looked forward to a comfortable Christmas.



On December 17, 1944, the good life for the 508th PIR ended. The Germans had launched a massive surprise attack through the heavily forested Ardennes, and the 508th PIR, still attached to the 82nd Airborne Division, was alerted to prepare for combat.

Early in the morning of December 18, a miserable cold day, the 508th PIR troops loaded into open trucks and rode all day to Werbomont, Belgium – a town located at the junction of two critical highways.

For several days, despite the lack of winter clothing and equipment, the regiment maneuvered to find the best position from which to destroy the German attack.

Thereafter, the 508th PIR troops fought the determined Germans and the bitter cold and deep snows of the Ardennes. The regiment spent Christmas Eve night executing a dangerous withdrawal from Vielsalm - a town on the Salm River. The 508 had provided a corridor to safety for the numerous survivors of the 106th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions that had been brutally mauled by the German's surprise attack.

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Hundreds of men and vehicles (tanks, artillery, and engineer) had transited the 508 corridor by December 24.

However, to provide the safety corridor the 508th PIR, was deployed in an eight-mile long salient, and was now in imminent danger of being destroyed by strong German forces. Moreover, withdrawal of the regiment was necessary to strengthen the allied blocking position.

Early in January 1945, the regiment participated in a counter-attack that helped destroy the German bulge. The attack by the 508th PIR troops carried them through the dense, hilly Hurtgen Forest and the fortified Siegfried Line all the way to the Roer River. The 508 troops suffered from the bitter cold, lack of shelter, lack of food and the need for medical evacuation means.

When the war ended, Ralph Booth was a Sergeant. He served in Frankfurt, Germany with the 508th PIR security force and honor guards supporting General Eisenhower's headquarters.

Ralph Booth served courageously throughout all of the 508th PIR campaigns, he earned:

- ?? Bronze Star and Purple Heart Medals
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Parachute Qualification badge with two stars for combat Jumps (Normandy and Holland)
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation
- ?? French and Belgium Fourrageres
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals - including the Occupation Medal with Germany Bar

Ralph and Donna Booth were married April 13, 1951. They raised five children: Barbara, Ralph E., Donald, Dennis, and David, and have 14 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.



Ralph and Donna Booth

Mrs. Donna J. Booth resides at 17452 N. 106th Avenue, Sun City, AZ 85373-1928

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This album was prepared for perpetual residence in the archives of the Camp Blanding Museum complex, operated by the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, Inc. Starke, Florida. We are grateful for the support and assistance of the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, and for their kindness in having the museum make our album available to historians, students, researchers and others interested in our background and brief history.

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October 19, 2004

G. G. . Stock

Hq1 Album Collator