

Joe Bressler - Private to Private First Class

Served with distinction in the Hq1 81mm Mortar Platoon from February 1944 to July 1945.

Joe Bressler is a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation." He is a modest, compassionate, sincere man always concerned with the welfare of others.

As anticipated, Joe Bressler's contribution for the album was concerned with the welfare of his comrades. Therefore, his WW II comrades provided information to augment his submission.



Joe Bressler was born November 8, 1921. He was raised and educated in Howard Beach, NY. Joe enlisted in the Army February 12, 1940, and experienced a soldiers' emotional reaction to the chaos, confusion and patriotism created by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Joe's pre-WW II Army training and disciplines that included service in Panama were immeasurable advantages on the battlefields of Europe.

In the post-WW II years, these same skills enhanced Joe's ability to serve his communities in law enforcement and later as an air marshal.

To everyone's benefit, Joe Bressler joined the Hq1 81mm Mortar Platoon of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508th PIR) in 1944. The experienced amiable Joe Bressler made many friends in Hq1, and became especially close to Mel Beets from Texas, and Oscar Prasse from Virginia. Joe became the unofficial "leader" of this triad.

It took something as large and violent as the Normandy D-Day invasion to separate the "triad." Chapter II, Combat Operations - Normandy, contains a synopsis of the awesome ordeal experienced by the painfully injured Joe and his heroic savior Oscar Prasse.

A magnificent tale of unsurpassed camaraderie, bravery and determination demonstrated by two young men who faced overwhelming odds and prevailed.

Mel Beets, the third member of the triad was missing. In Normandy, Mel met up with the group of Hq1 men that eventually ended up occupying "Hells Half Acre." (See Chapter II, Combat Operations – Normandy). As this small group of paratroopers was searching for the 508th PIR, Mel volunteered to contact what the group believed were friendly troopers. Mel was captured.

Mel Beets later escaped from the Germans with the help of the French underground and returned to Nottingham. In the interim, Mel Beets' fate was unknown to his friends.

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Joe Bressler says.

"I owe my life to Oscar Prasse. I will never forget the heroism, compassion and dedication Oscar demonstrated in saving my life during our five days together in Normandy.

Oscar carried me on his back, hid and protected me in an attic, and at great personal risk, killed Germans to obtain weapons and food to sustain us.

When we finally vacated the attic, I left some French franc notes marked with my name as a gratuity.

[Joe's thoughtful action has become a legend in Normandy.]

On June 11, 1944 we were relieved [rescued] by a combat patrol from the 90th Infantry Division. The patrol evacuated me and I was hospitalized in England. Oscar Prasse was guided to nearby 508th PIR troops.

I spent several months in hospitals in England, while Oscar continued destroying the Third Reich."

Oscar Prasse survived the Normandy campaign and returned to the tent encampment in Nottingham, concerned about the welfare of his missing comrades.



Weeks later, Joe Bressler bored with hospital life, made his way to Nottingham. Greeted by jubilant comrades, Joe was

told, "We are packing up to move to a marshaling airfield." [The photo shows a few Hq1 Normandy survivors with replacements. Oscar on the left (circled), Joe on the Right (circled).]

The Hq1 officers told Joe they were not operating a recuperation resort and he should return to the hospital. Joe threw his crutches aside and moved into the 81mm Mortar Platoon tents - where he was united with Oscar Prasse.

Joe and Oscar met the replacements for their friends lost in Normandy and helped get them ready for the next mission.

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On September 17, 1944, a sunny Sunday afternoon, Joe Bressler and Oscar Prasse parachuted into a field south of Nijmegen, Holland. That night their battalion tried to capture the Nijmegen Highway Bridge over the Waal River. Before the bridge could be captured, the battalion was recalled to clear the landing zone of German antiaircraft guns and infantry waiting to destroy the countless gliders carrying the 82nd Airborne Division artillery and engineer equipment.

In a furious frontal attack, all of the Germans were killed, captured or routed, and the gliders landed safely.

Joe Bressler continues.

“On November 11, 1944, after months of fighting Germans in muddy fields and rain, we marched 22 miles to the town of Oss, and met with trucks that took us to Sissonne, France.

Sissonne looked great. We were housed in a French Artillery Post. We had warm dry rooms, hot food, and very little work. The City of Reims was near and Paris was not too far away.

Oscar Prasse and I had a joyous reunion with our beloved comrade Mel Beets. After several days of reminiscing, and story telling our reunion celebration ended abruptly on December 17, 1944.

The Germans had launched a massive surprise attack that demolished our front line divisions, and penetrated hundreds of miles into Belgium.

The 508th PIR, still attached to the 82nd Airborne Division, was alerted to help block and destroy the German “bulge.” Early on December 18, a bitter cold day, the regiment, sans winter clothing and equipment, loaded into open trucks and rode all day to Werbomont, Belgium.

We spent the next days maneuvering to find the best terrain to occupy and blunt the German incursion.

On December 23-24, the 508th PIR was deployed to provide a safety corridor for the survivors of the 106th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions that had been severely mauled and overrun in the first days of the German attack. Hundreds of tanks, trucks, artillery and desperate men transited the 508th PIR corridor to safety.

On Christmas Eve the 508th PIR executed a perilous eight-mile withdrawal over snow-covered densely forested hills to the main battle position where we helped stop the German’s last desperate attack.”

Note: Oscar Prasse’s memoirs contain a description of the strategy and skill employed by the triad to prevent their hoard of Christmas

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cheer from being confiscated by the attacking Germans or envious Hq1 officers.

"In the first weeks of January 1945, the 508th PIR launched an offensive to destroy the Germans remaining in the bulge area, penetrate the Siegfried Line fortifications, and seize the west shore of the Roer River.

They were tough days. We fought through the deep snows and the heavily forested Ardennes, without shelter or hot food, and often without medical evacuation means. We fought through the Siegfried Line and reached the Roer River. The price was high; we absorbed as many cold weather casualties as the Germans inflicted upon us.

Oscar Prasse was evacuated with severely frozen feet. It was the last time I saw Oscar."

"In February 1945 we broke contact with the Germans and returned to Sissonne. We moved into a tent camp.

We held memorial services for our lost comrades, welcomed replacements and started training, which included a practice jump.

A few weeks later, we were alerted to parachute into German prisoner-of-war camps to liberate allied prisoners.

We packed up and moved to airports near Paris ready to execute the mission.

However, the war in Europe ended, our missions were canceled, and we returned to Sissonne. A few days later the 508th PIR was selected for Occupation duty as General Eisenhower's security force and honor guard."

The 508th PIR packed and moved to Germany. Joe Bressler packed and went home. A point system for returning qualified men to the United States was being implemented and Joe qualified. Joe was discharged from the Army July 3, 1945 at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Joe Bressler served with distinction in the Army from February 12, 1940 to July 3, 1945. He was awarded:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal
- ?? Purple Heart Medal
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Four battle stars
- ?? Parachute Qualification Badge with two stars for combat jumps (Normandy and Holland).
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation

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- ?? French and Belgium Fourrageres
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals

Joe and Lillian Bressler were married in October 1943 and raised six children. Unfortunately Lillian died in 1976.

Joe Bressler was an “organizer.” Although the 508th PIR Association was not established until 1975, Joe held several reunions in New York City in the late ‘40s. Apparently, as shown in the photo everyone had a grand time.



Joe Bressler and Rebecca (Elving) were married February 14, 1990 in Las Vegas.

Joe and Becky reside at: 1505 N Riverside Drive, Pompano Beach, Florida 33062-3322

Hq1 1946 Reunion
L. to R. Marie Reynolds, Ruth and Mel Beets, Joe

Epilogue

Joe Bressler and Mel Beets lost track of Oscar Prasse after the war. He had married and was employed in Virginia.



During Hq1 reunions, Joe and Mel often talked about Oscar and wondered where he was – he was a company favorite.

Joe and Rebecca Bressler in Las Vegas

Tired of the speculations about Oscar, one of the Hq1 men vowed he would find Oscar before the next reunion. Within the week, Oscar was located in a Virginia Beach nursing home.

Jim Wynne from the HQ1 Light Machine Gun Platoon visited the nursing home and confirmed that Oscar Prasse was a resident. Jim Wynne sponsored a Hq1 reunion and brought Oscar for a joyous and emotional meeting with his WW II comrades. Mel Beets was present but Joe Bressler unfortunately could not get to the reunion. However, Joe and Oscar had many belated telephone conversations.

Oscar Prasse died in 1993. Mel Beets died in 2001 Joe Bressler and Becky continue to attend 508th PIR Association and Hq1 reunions.

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This Album is Not For Sale

This excerpt from the "We Served Proudly, The Men of Hq1" album contains the recollections of men who in their youth risked their lives in furtherance of our national interests. These memoirs are sacred to them -- especially those events alluding to activities in which comrades lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe.

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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Copies of the album have been presented to the Hq1 veterans or their survivors that contributed information for the effort. To facilitate reproducing copies of individual memoirs for relatives or friends, the memoirs have been developed as separate entities.

October 19, 2004

George S. Stock

Hq1 Album Collator