

Kenneth R. Cuddeback - Private to Private First Class

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Communications Platoon from July 1944 to November 24, 1945.

Kenneth Cuddeback was a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."

Kenneth died March 19, 2000. His beloved wife Marion, family, and WW II comrades contributed information for this summary.



Kenneth was born January 2, 1925. He graduated from West Chester High School and attended Iowa State University before enlisting in the Army on February 10, 1943. After basic training Kenneth was sent to Europe as a replacement.

In England, Kenneth Cuddeback volunteered for parachutist training. He qualified as a parachutist and was selected for additional training as a communications specialist.

Kenneth completed the communications school program and was assigned to the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) in Nottingham.

The 508th PIR attached to the 82nd Airborne Division had parachuted into Normandy on June 6, 1944 (D-Day) and was still engaged in combat.

The regiment had sustained significant casualties (2056 men parachuted into Normandy, 1161 became casualties of which 307 were buried in France). Kenneth Cuddeback and the other casualties were timely replacements.

On July 15, 1944 the battle-seasoned 508th PIR survivors returned to a "heroes" welcome in Nottingham, and Kenneth was assigned to the Hq1 Communications Platoon.

Kenneth and the other replacements were warmly welcomed by the veterans; they provided the means for reconstituting the regiment.

A priceless camaraderie developed among the veterans and the replacements that enhanced Hq1's combat readiness.

Kenneth Cuddeback had an active, dangerous, and interesting career in Hq1 of the 508th PIR.

- ?? In September 1944 he made a hazardous daylight combat jump into Holland
- ?? In December 1944 he was fighting in the "Battle of the Bulge"
- ?? On Christmas Eve 1944 he participated in a perilous night withdrawal
- ?? In January 1945 he participated in a massive counterattack to destroy the Third Reich

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- ?? In late January and early February 1945, he helped penetrate and destroy the heavily fortified Siegfried Line
- ?? In February 1945, he was on the west bank of the Roer River, the threshold to industrial Germany
- ?? Kenneth ended his military service as a proud member of the 508th PIR security forces and honor guards supporting General Eisenhower's headquarters in Germany

Kenneth Cuddeback earned:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead
- ?? Three battle stars
- ?? Parachute Qualification badge with star (combat jump in Holland)
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Belgium Fourragere
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals including the Victory medal and Occupation medal with Germany Bar

Kenneth Cuddeback returned to Iowa and on May 28, 1946 married his high school sweetheart, Marion McDowell in West Chester.

He then joined with his father in operating Cuddeback Farms and managed the farm until his death in 2000 following heart surgery.

Note: The majority of Hq1 men averaged 19 years of age when they joined the company. Many of them had agricultural backgrounds, and most of the men had similar educations. Accordingly, the emotions, thoughts, and perspectives depicted herein or which might emerge contribute to the profile of the men that served proudly in Hq1. They were dedicated heroes.

An enlightening way to gain a perspective of the kind of men who served as paratroopers during WW II is to listen to what their children have to say about them. For example, Kenneth Cuddeback's son Jim wrote an article for a local newspaper about his father. Jim says:

"The article is about my father but I wrote it as a thank you to all service men and women. While I wrote the article, I kept thinking about the men of Hq1 that I had met with my father during their many reunions."

Jim continues. "I wrote the article without my Dad's knowledge from my recollections of what he had told me over the years, and from the many stories I had heard from his WW II comrades."

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"Washington Man Thanks His Father, Others For Defending Our Nation's Freedom" By Jim Cuddeback [Published November 19, 1999 in the Washington [Iowa] Evening Journal.]

The young soldier tried to smile for the camera. He was apprehensive about what lay ahead but did not want to let it show in the picture. It was time to board the plane that would take him over Holland that afternoon, and he wanted one last picture before he added the little camera to the other equipment he was carrying. The equipment was heavy. It included the main parachute on his back and a reserve chute in the front, seven grenades, an antitank mine, gas mask, entrenching tool, emergency rations for three days, some underwear, and an M-1 Carbine with 200 rounds of ammunition.

[The Hq1 communications equipment and supplies (radios, spare batteries, telephones, reels of wire, etc.) were wrapped into equipment bundles which were hooked to the belly of the plane in pararacks or carried in the cabin to be shoved out the door before the jumpers.]



This would be his sixth jump. The first five jumps had been into friendly fields in England, where the 82nd Airborne Division had been stationed since before the D-Day invasion of Normandy. The 82nd had suffered tremendous casualties fighting in France. This young soldier, along with many others, were the replacements. His airborne training had been brief but strenuous and now he and the other replacements and the seasoned veterans were ready to board C-47s for the brief flight over the English Channel to Holland.

The nineteen-year-old soldier's thoughts turned to his family and friends in Iowa. Just sixteen months earlier, he had graduated from high school in West Chester. He was a farm boy at heart, having grown up on a family farm just a few miles west of Washington [Iowa]. His parents and sister were still there, knowing little of what he was about to face. His girlfriend had just graduated from West Chester and was in her first year of college.

The soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division had just learned that this jump was to be made about 70 miles behind the German front lines into occupied Holland. Their goal was to capture the bridge at Nijmegen as part of Operation Market-Garden, the allied offensive to capture and hold five bridges over major waterways. The day was Sunday Sept. 17, 1944. The C-47s were small by today's standards, each plane carried a "stick" of 18 paratroopers. The paratroopers were to go out the plane's door at an altitude of 300--500 feet. This way they would get to the ground quickly, lessening their chances of being shot on the way down. Unfortunately the planes

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started taking ground fire after crossing the English Channel and the pilots climbed to higher altitudes. Feeling the planes gaining altitude did not meet well with the troopers inside. Soon the order came to "stand up and hook up."

In a few seconds the young paratrooper took the biggest step of his life. It was a good feeling to feel the sharp jerk as his main chute deployed. Around him he could hear the boom of antiaircraft guns shooting at the planes. He felt something hit his body but he did not feel any pain (he later found a piece of antiaircraft shrapnel embedded in the stock of his carbine).

His first impression of Holland was that it was very hard as he landed. At least he was on the ground alive and with no broken bones. He quickly got out of his parachute harness and started looking for the other members of his platoon so they could get organized into a fighting unit, ready to meet the unknown challenges ahead.

After several days of house-to-house combat in the city of Nijmegen, and a perilous river crossing in canvas collapsible boats, the bridge at Nijmegen was captured intact. Later in 1944 and the winter of '45, the men of the 82nd Airborne Division would again distinguish themselves as they helped stop the German offensive in Belgium in the costliest single battle ever fought by U.S. soldiers, the Battle of the Bulge. This young soldier would live to see many of his fellow troopers killed or wounded in combat.

When World War II ended in 1945 [after several months of occupation duty as honor guards and security forces for General Eisenhower's headquarters in Frankfurt-am-Main] the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment returned to the United States] our young soldier would return to the family farm in Iowa where he married his high school sweetheart (now wife of 53 years). The soldier that I am writing about is my father, Kenneth Cuddeback.

To my father and to all of the other men and women who have put on the uniform and defended our nation's freedom over the years, I say a heartfelt thank you."



Kenneth and Marion Cuddeback

Over the years, Kenneth and Marion Cuddeback participated in the activities of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment WW II Association and Hq1. They attended reunions, cheered up ailing friends and comrades and were loved and respected by their contemporaries.

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After Kenneth Cuddeback died in 2000, Marion his wife and James his son continued to participate in the Hq1 and Association activities. Ken would like that!

Marion Cuddeback resides at 1690 250th Street, Washington, IA 52353

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.

No reproduction or distribution restrictions are imposed or implied for the album or pages thereof -- providing such actions are not undertaken for profit.

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 . Stock

Hq1 Album Collator