

Arnold C. Foster - Private to Staff Sergeant

Served with distinction in the Hq1 81mm Mortar Platoon as Agent Instrument Corporal and Section Leader, from October 30, 1942 to October 13, 1945.



Arnold Foster was a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation." He loved his family, his country, and his comrades - attributes prevalent in all Hq1 men.

Arnold Foster was born June 28, 1922, in Jennings County, Indiana and joined the Army October 23, 1942 in Indianapolis. He was a courageous soldier, a competent leader, and a cherished friend that served proudly as a paratrooper in World War II.

On November 6, 1945, Arnold returned home from military service and enjoyed a successful post-war life dedicated to his beloved wife Alice, raising two children, and supporting his church and community.

Arnold maintained lifetime friendships with the men he served with in Hq1, and enjoyed attending 508th PIR Association and Hq1 reunions.

Arnold served with distinction in the Army from October 23, 1942 to November 6, 1945. He was awarded:

- ?? Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead and four battle stars
- ?? 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

Arnold Foster died in 2001. His beloved wife Alice and WW II comrades provided information for this summary.

Arnold enlisted in the Army with the intention of becoming a paratrooper. The usually quiet Arnold let his desire for airborne training be known. Soon he was on a train going to Starke, Florida.

Arnold protested loudly that the Parachute School was at Fort Benning, GA, but he got off the train in Starke, Florida. He was immediately loaded into a truck, which took him to an abandoned Civil Conservation Camp (CCC) consisting of small wooden tarpaper covered buildings. A Sergeant said. "Welcome to Camp Blanding."

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Arnold always said that his situation improved when he was assigned to Headquarters Company of the First Battalion (Hq1), 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508th PIR). He served his entire military career in Hq1.

However, no one ever told him that he would not go to jump school for many months. Or that before he could go to jump school he first had to complete basic infantry training, and pre-airborne school physical training. He also was not aware that the 508th PIR had been activated only a few days earlier, and had only enough soldiers and cadre to form the First Battalion.

Moreover, there would be no passes or time off until he completed the training programs, bad news for married men like Arnold Foster.

Days later, Arnold learned that he was in a test program to determine whether it was more efficient to train entire units at Fort Benning as parachutists, or to continue training individuals at the school, and assign them to airborne units after they qualified.

On February 28, 1943, Arnold Foster qualified as parachutist and pinned on the coveted parachute wings. He left immediately for a ten-day furlough with Alice in Indiana, his first days off since October 1942.

Arnold was a rare sight in the Indiana farming community; no one in the area had apparently ever seen a soldier wearing brown boots and a jaunty overseas cap with a blue and white parachute patch.

Arnold often recalled his confrontation with two Military Policemen that ordered him to "unblouse" his trousers from his jump boots.

Arnold Foster returned to Fort Benning, and the 508th PIR moved to Camp Mackall, NC. At Camp Mackall, Arnold started what most farm boys considered a big adventure. They were fighting for their country, accomplishing difficult tasks, mastering intrinsic maneuvers, firing various weapons, and improving their parachutist's skills.

In December 1943, the 508th PIR moved to New York City and boarded the "James Parker" for an eleven-day trip to Ireland. After several weeks of weapons firing, physical training, and small field exercises, the regiment moved to a tent camp near Nottingham, England. The regiment immediately implemented a vigorous training program to prepare for combat somewhere in Europe. The program included dangerous night parachute jumps and many field exercises.

Arnold Foster participated in all four of the 508th PIR campaigns.

On June 6, 1944, he parachuted into Normandy, France in the vanguard of the D-Day invasion forces.

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On September 17, 1944, a Sunday afternoon, Corporal Arnold Foster parachuted into a field south of Nijmegen, Holland. That night, while attacking to seize the Nijmegen Bridge over the Waal River, Arnold was shot in the hand by a German machine gunner.

After weeks of fighting, the 508th PIR marched to Oss, Holland where it met trucks and rode to Sissonne, France.

Arnold liked Sissonne. He had a warm dry bed in a French Artillery Post, hot food, hot showers, and did very little training. He looked forward to a Christmas without "incoming" German artillery shells, rocket attacks, and long dangerous marches. He was in paradise but he missed Alice.

Paradise for Arnold ended on December 17, 1944. The Germans had launched a surprise attack that penetrated hundreds of miles into the allied area. The 508th PIR still attached to the 82nd Airborne Division was alerted to stop and destroy the German forces.

On the morning of December 18, 1944, a bitter cold day, the 508th PIR without winter clothing or equipment departed from Sissonne in trucks destined for Werbomont, Belgium. Thereafter, the regiment fought continuously in bitter cold, sunless days, through deep snow and the densely forested Ardennes. It penetrated the Siegfried Line and destroyed its fortifications.

February 1945 found the 508th PIR on the west shore of the Roer River. The cost was high. The 508th PIR sustained 828 casualties – killed, wounded, or missing, 40% of these casualties were attributed to cold weather injuries. The regiment was ordered to break contact with the Germans and return to Sissonne, France. However, the comfortable quarters the 508th PIR had vacated in December 1944 were now occupied by a General hospital. The regiment moved into a tent camp.

However, everyone was authorized extra rations to compensate for all the meals they had missed during the Battle of the Bulge and many men put on much needed weight.

After the 508th PIR conducted memorial services for the men lost in the Ardennes, and welcomed replacements, a training program was initiated - including a practice parachute jump and field exercises.

In April 1945, the 508th PIR was tasked to parachute into or near prisoner-of-war camps to liberate the German held allied prisoners. The 508th PIR moved to airports near Paris and prepared for the missions.

However, the war in Europe ended in May, and the missions were canceled. The regiment was returned to Sissonne to await orders. The orders came fast.

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The 508th PIR was ordered to join the occupation forces as the security force and honor guard for General Eisenhower's headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany. The regiment quickly moved to Heddernheim a suburb of Frankfurt.

Arnold functioned as Sergeant of the Guard at the Supreme Allied Headquarters and participated in honor guard formations.

He departed from Hq1 in October 1945 and was separated from the Army November 6, 1945.

Arnold and Alice Foster settled in Seymour, Indiana and raised two children Linda and David. Arnold worked for the railroad and later in the Dairy Industry. He was extremely active and respected in church activities and community affairs.

The Fosters bought a comfortable house and sufficient ground for raising modest crops and not so modest pigs.



Arnold and Alice Foster

**Mrs. Alice Foster resides at
8229 N County Road
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This album was prepared for perpetual residence in the arch-ives 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

~~Georg. S. S.~~

Hq1 Album Collator