

# Raymond (Ray) Kennedy – Private

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Communications Platoon from July 3, 1944 to November 9, 1945.

Ray performed a critically sensitive and trusted function as the Battalion Commander's personal radio operator. He functioned at the core of the battalion's combat trials and accomplishments.

Ray served his country, raised a remarkable family and is highly respected in his community. He is a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."



Consistent with the profile he presented in Hq1 during WW II, Ray continues to be a quiet, modest man. His submission for the Hq1 album consisted of his discharge from the Army. Apparently, the discharge contained all the data, Ray thought we ought to have.

Happily, an examination of Ray's discharge shows he "Served Proudly." Now hear the rest of the story as provided by his WW II comrades.

Ray was born September 10, 1925. He was raised in Baton Rouge, LA and entered the Army November 15, 1943. A few days after his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, he parachuted into Holland, as a member of Hq1, 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (508<sup>th</sup> PIR).

The 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was participating in Operation Market Garden, a massive assembly of American and British airborne and armored troops deployed to liberate the Netherlands. Ray landed near the City of Nijmegen.

Despite German infantry and anti-aircraft fire, Ray landed unscratched, retrieved his precious radio, and joined his battalion commander. That night they led the battalion into Nijmegen to capture the highway bridge over the Waal River. However, before the bridge could be taken, the battalion was recalled to the drop zone area.

German infantry supported with 20 anti-aircraft guns had occupied the area, and was waiting to destroy the hundreds of fragile gliders scheduled to land there at noon. The incoming gliders were carrying the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division artillery and engineer equipment, and ammunition.

The First Battalion launched a furious frontal attack into the direct fire of the German anti-aircraft guns with the muzzles lowered to engage the assaulting troops. The battalion overran the German infantry and destroyed 19 of the 20 anti-aircraft guns, killing or capturing the infantry. All of the arriving gliders landed safely. The First Battalion's heroic action that day saved hundreds of American lives.

Following weeks of fighting in Holland, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was relieved and moved to Sissonne, France, where it occupied an old French Artillery Post with warm dry beds,

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and hot showers and good food. Weapons were repaired or replaced, replacements [new troopers] were absorbed into the regiment, and everyone settled down for a comfortable Christmas.

Ray's utopia evaporated on December 17, 1944. The desperate Germans had launched a surprise attack through the dense forests of the Ardennes. The rapidly moving German formations had overrun and mauled several American divisions, killing or capturing hundreds of men.

The massive German incursion into the allied area created a gigantic bulge extending hundreds of miles, thus the campaign was named the "Battle of the Bulge."

The 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was alerted to move against the German bulge. The next morning, December 18, the regiment loaded in trucks moved to Werbomont, Belgium, a town astride two critical highways.

On December 21, winter arrived in Belgium with a heavy snowfall. The 508<sup>th</sup> troopers suffered, they were without shelter, winter clothing or equipment..

After perilous days of fighting, including a prudent very dangerous Christmas Eve regimental withdrawal, the German attack was stopped.

On January 7, 1945, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR went on the offensive. The troopers fought through deep snow and over heavily forested hills, on sunless, bitter cold days, capturing towns, killing Germans, and destroying the Siegfried Line fortifications. The 508<sup>th</sup> PIR offensive ended on the west shore of the Roer River.

The regiment had sustained 828 casualties, killed, wounded or missing. The bitter cold weather, lack of shelter, and the inability to evacuate the wounded caused almost half the casualties.

On February 18, 1945, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR broke contact with the Germans and returned to Sissonne, France, and moved into tents.

Memorial services were held for our comrades, replacements were processed, and a training program was started. After a disastrous practice parachute jump, the regiment moved to airfields near Paris prepared to jump into or near prisoner-of-war camps to free allied prisoners.

The war in Europe ended and the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR moved to Hedderheim, Germany for occupation duty. General Eisenhower had requested the regiment for duty as the security force and honor guard for his headquarters.

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Raymond Kennedy served in the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR from July 3, 1944 to November 9, 1945 when he re-enlisted in the Army. Ray earned:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal
- ?? Purple Heart Medal
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Three battle stars
- ?? Parachute Qualification badge with star for a combat jump
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation
- ?? Belgium Fourragere
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals including the Occupation Medal with Germany Bar.

Ray returned to the United States November 27, 1945. On December 4, 1945 in Baton Rouge, LA., Ray married Edna Lee Gayle.

Ray served in the Army at Fort Hood, TX, until he was discharged June 2, 1947.

Ray and Edna established a residence in Baton Rouge and raised three sons Ken, Fred, and Roy. They enjoy having six grandchildren and one great grandchild.



**Raymond and Edna Kennedy**

Ray and Edna Kennedy reside at 1126 Sinbad Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70714-3949

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This Album is Not For Sale

**T**his 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.

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George S. Stock

Hq1 Album Collator