

Grady C. Murray, Private to Private First Class

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Communications Platoon from July 1944 to December 1945 when he transferred to the 504th PIR, 82nd Airborne Division for transportation to the United States, and participation in the New York City WW II Victory Parade.



Grady Murray was an outstanding, courageous soldier. Always cheerful and dependable. A very popular member of Hq1.

Grady Murray is a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."

Grady Murray tells his story. "I was born March 15, 1924 and grew up in Grover, SC. My father was a cattle farmer. He also operated a slaughter house and meat market. I attended elementary school in Grover and high school in St. George, SC. In December 1941, I was employed as an apprentice machinist in the Charleston Naval Shipyard.

In June 1943, I volunteered for military service and was inducted at Fort Jackson, SC in August 1943. I completed basic Infantry training at Camp Wheeler, GA, and in November 1943, volunteered for parachutist training. I qualified as a parachutist at Fort Benning, GA, and on April 15, 1944 graduated from the Communications School as a low speed radio operator.

In June 1944, I was shipped overseas with a group of casuals. We landed in Glasgow, Scotland. After orientation lectures, we were sent to a Replacement Center in Tidworth, England.

On July 8, 1944, I was assigned to the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508th PIR) in Nottingham, England, and joined the Hq1 Communications Platoon – for the duration.

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

On July 15, 1944, the battle-seasoned veterans of the 508th PIR returned to Nottingham. The regiment had suffered serious casualties - 2056 men had parachuted into Normandy on D-Day; 1161 were casualties of which 307 were buried in France. We replacements were warmly welcomed and I became a 'Red Devil.'

Following weeks of arduous training, the 508th PIR moved to an airfield and prepared to jump at Tournai, Belgium. However, the drop at Tournai and an alternate drop at Leige were canceled. Patton's Third Army was racing through France into

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Belgium and overran both objectives. We returned to our tents in Nottingham with sighs of relief.

Our stay in Nottingham was brief. In mid-September, we rolled equipment bundles, packed our gear and moved again to the airfield.

After several briefings and equipment inspections, we were ready to go.

At 1100 o'clock on September 17, 1944, a bright Sunday, after a breakfast of eggs and bacon (no grits), we loaded into C-47s and flew to Holland. About 1300 hours after running a gauntlet of antiaircraft and small arms fire, we parachuted into a field south of Nijmegen. The field was occupied by German anti-aircraft guns and infantry. As our planes covered the sky with descending parachutists, the Germans ceased firing and our 508th PIR troopers killed or captured those Germans that did not abandoned their positions and weapons.

We gathered up our equipment, assembled rapidly, and moved quickly to capture our initial objective.

That night a task force comprised of Company A & B supported by the Hq1 Mortar Platoon, a section of Light Machine Guns and communications personnel moved to Nijmegen to try and capture the strongly held highway bridge over the Waal River."



Note: Capturing the Nijmegen Bridge would permit the British forces to move through Nijmegen to Arnheim. After taking Arnheim and turning east, the British could bypass the Siegfried Line. Some analysts believe that if the maneuver had succeeded, the war in Europe would have ended by December 1944.

"However, early on the morning of September 18, our task force was ordered to break contact with the Germans and return as quickly as possible to the drop zone. A Germans force of infantry with antiaircraft guns and machine guns was waiting to destroy the fragile gliders carrying the division's three artillery battalions, and heavy engineer equipment.

Our task was to clear the landing zone of Germans and protect the arriving gliders.

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Our battalion made a heroic frontal attack; it overran and destroyed the antiaircraft guns, and killed or captured the Infantry. All of the gliders landed safely.

The 82nd Airborne Division captured the Nijmegen highway bridge a few days later, but the British were unable to capture the Arnheim Bridge.

On November 11, 1944, after weeks of fighting and maneuvering, the 82nd Airborne Division with the 508th PIR attached was relieved from British command.

We marched 22 miles to the town of Oss, Holland to meet trucks that carried us to Sissonne, France.

In Sissonne, we occupied a French Artillery Post, and looked forward to a few weeks of the 'good' life - warm beds, hot meals, showers and a pleasant Christmas.

The 508th PIR's stay in Sissonne was interrupted on December 18, 1944 when it loaded on huge open tractor-trailer trucks and rode for countless, miserable, cold hours to Werbomont, Belgium. The Germans had launched a massive attack to split the allied forces and capture the English Channel ports. Our task was to help blunt and destroy the German attack and penetration.

During the following days, we frequently changed our position as the regiment maneuvered to confront the German forces from the most advantageous position. On December 21, winter arrived in Belgium when a heavy snow began to fall.

On December 23, at Vielsalm, Belgium a small town overlooking the Salm River, we made contact with the attacking German infantry and armored forces. The 508th PIR was providing an escape corridor through which the survivors of the badly mauled 106th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions could evade the overwhelming German forces. The corridor was an eight-mile salient stretching from the Salm River through the town of Vielsalm and into the Corps rear areas. In the next 24 hours hundreds of vehicles (tanks, trucks) and desperate troops raced through the 508th PIR corridor to safety.

The 508th PIR, however, was in a perilous position, stretched out like a finger for eight miles, and at the risk of being cutoff and destroyed at any moment. Therefore, on a bitter cold Christmas Eve night, the 508th PIR was ordered to break contact with the Germans and withdraw to a defensive position along the Corps line.

In executing the order, the 508th PIR spent Christmas Eve continuously harassed by German combat patrols, as it traversed snow covered roads and trails and densely forested areas.

On Christmas morning, anticipating a massive German attack, the regiment established a defensive position along a steep ridge. We dug holes cleared fire lanes and set up outposts. Our efforts paid off.

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Over the next couple of days, we successfully fought off several large German combat formations, killing countless Germans.

Our morale rose on January 7, 1945 when the allied forces started a counterattack to destroy the German penetration. The 508th PIR launched an assault to retake the Their-du-Mont Ridge [the 508th PIR had surrendered the ridge the night of December 24] overlooking the Salm River.

Following a bloody battle, in which 508th PIR troops struggled in deep snow, across open terrain, into the direct fire from anti-aircraft guns, the ridge was taken and organized before dark. [The grateful Belgian people have erected a monument at the Their-du-Mont Ridge commemorating the heroic attack by the 508th PIR.]

During the following weeks, we fought a desperate German Army in bitter cold weather and deep snows through the thickly wooded Ardennes forests and the Siegfried Line, all the way to the Roer River.

To our surprise, on February 16, 1945, we were ordered to break contact with the German forces and prepare to return to Sissonne, France.

At the time, we did not know that our combat days were over or that our reasonably comfortable quarters in the Artillery Post had been occupied by a hospital. Following a long uncomfortable train ride in World War I "forty and eight" boxcars (40 men and 8 horses), Hq1 was back in Sissonne.

On March 14, 1945, our battalion made a practice jump that resulted in disaster. As the men were parachuting from the leading C-47s, a plane at the rear of the column threw a propeller. The disabled plane dove through the jumpers into the ground and exploded, the four-man crew died.

Seven parachutists from Hq & HQ Company were killed, some men were draped over the wings of the plane when it exploded. Additionally, Pvt. C. L. Clemons, Hq1, was killed when his parachute failed to open.

Shortly thereafter, the 508th PIR was alerted to parachute into German prisoner-of-war camps, to liberate allied prisoners. We quickly packed our gear and boarded the 40&8s and rode to airfields near Chartres, south-west of Paris. After several false starts and canceled missions, the Germans surrendered. The war in Europe was over.

The 508th PIR returned to Sissonne and prepared to move into Germany as part of the Occupation force. We were ordered to Frankfurt, Germany and assigned to General Eisenhower's headquarters as his security force and honor guard for visiting dignitaries. Hq1 men were billeted in apartments in Heddernheim, a suburb of Frankfurt.

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In December 1945, based upon a 'point system,' I left Hq1 and was assigned to the First Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment for transportation to the United States.

We arrived in New York in early January, and on January 12, 1946, I marched down 5th Avenue with the 82nd Airborne Division to celebrate V-E Day.

A few days later I was sent to Fort Gordon, Georgia and discharged on January 17, 1946."

Grady Murray earned:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Parachute Qualification badge with a star for a combat jump (Holland)
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Belgium Fourragere
- ?? Numerous defense medals including the European Theater of Operations (ETO) Medal with Invasion Arrowhead and three battle stars
- ?? European Victory Medal
- ?? Occupation Medal with Germany Bar.

Grady Murray concludes.

"In March of 1946, I returned to the Naval Shipyard in Charleston, SC and finished my apprenticeship as a machinist. Later I was promoted to a tool and die maker, and retired in 1979 as a Shop Foreman, with 39 years service.

In 1948, I met and married Emma Mae Thompson and we raised three sons, Grady Jr. who graduated from Clemson University, Emmett and Samuel who both graduated from Lander College."

Grady Murray was an outstanding soldier, a trustworthy comrade, a good husband and father and a noteworthy citizen. One of the "best" of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."



Grady and Emma Mae Murray

Grady and Emma Mae Murray reside at 1962 HWY 15 South. Grover, SC 29447

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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. Stokel

Hq1 Album Collator