

First Sergeant Kenneth Martin Schroeder
ASN - 16070691
Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion
508th Parachute Infantry Regiment

Ken Schroeder entered military service from his home in Lombard, Illinois on May 15, 1942 at Chicago, Illinois. He volunteered for the United States Army and for parachute duty at Camp Grant, Illinois, and on May 28, 1942, was assigned to and joined Company A, 2nd Platoon, 61st Infantry Training Battalion stationed at Camp Walters, Texas for basic training. After basic training he was assigned to the Parachute School at Fort Benning, Georgia, for four weeks of training and presented with his wings on October 17, 1942.

During parachute school he was interviewed, selected for and assigned to the duties of Acting Platoon Sergeant with the rank of Corporal, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment which was to be formed on October 20, 1942 at Camp Blanding, Florida, for the training of new recruits and advanced training of established troops.

After joining the 508th he was promoted in rank on three separate occasions: at Camp Blanding in December of 1942 to the rank of Sergeant with the duties of Acting Platoon Sergeant, in January of 1943 to the rank of Staff Sergeant with the principal duties of Platoon Leader, and again in June of 1943 while at Camp Mackall he was promoted to the rank of First Sergeant, Head Noncommissioned Officer of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He chose to retain this rank and remain with this unit, despite the opportunity to be battlefield commissioned on three separate occasions throughout World War II.

When asked why he declined the field commissions, he stated that the army at that time would not allow field-commissioned officers to remain with their original units and would require him to transfer to another company, and he thought that transferring to a different company would be a disservice to the company of men that he had helped to train and helped to command.

After training new troops at Camp Blanding and Fort Benning in March of 1943 he moved with the regiment to Camp Mackall, North Carolina, for nine months of tactical and advanced training including maneuvers in South Carolina and Tennessee. During the October Gallatin, Tennessee night jump he landed in a plowed field and broke his right ankle, then walked a half-mile to regroup with his unit. After hospitalization he rejoined the Company, then entrained for Camp Shanks, New York, to ship out for further training in Northern Ireland and Nottingham, England.

Ken participated in the parachute invasion of Normandy, France on June 6, 1944, D-Day, the parachute invasion of Nijmegen, Holland on September 17, 1944, the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium, the Occupation of Germany and honor guard duties in Frankfurt.

When asked about the invasions during the war, he started with Normandy. Ken stated that he jumped at 0215 hours on the morning of June 6, 1944, D-Day: the sky was like the Fourth of July except for the ack-ack and machine gun fire. Their plane was driven off course and required the stick to jump off their intended drop zone. The stick and the company had been dispersed all over the interior of Normandy. He landed close to a schoolhouse near Picauville at about 0400 hours where he met one of the men of his company and they slipped through hedgerows and across fields until they arrived near the intended assembly area at about 0600 hours. There were about thirty men at the assembly area, including the Colonel, pinned down by sniper and machine gun fire. It took them most of the day to get out from under the gunfire. At about 1600 hours the group split up and made way to a new reassembly position. After reassembling, now with a group of about two hundred men, they were ordered to Hill 30 to set up a defensive position. This defensive position which lasted for four days, without re-supply or support, has been credited by many historians as one of the major reasons for the overall success of the American Airborne mission in Normandy.

Ken continued to state that the next twenty-eight days were just as hard on the men as the first five days; losses and wounded on Hill 131 on July 3rd, and especially on Hill 95 on July 5th and 6th, were tough to take. Contact with the enemy was halted after Hill 95 on about the 7th or 8th of July.

Ken was injured on June 6th while traversing some hedgerows. A Kraut hit him in the face with the end of a butt stock. Ken summarily returned the favor and dispatched the enemy. After checking the enemy, Ken noticed an American Airborne ring and removed it from the Kraut's hand. Ken wore that ring until he passed away on November 17, 1998. After Ken's death many of the men wrote that if it had not been for Ken's demanding training of the men, many of them might not have survived.

The Nijmegen invasion was a daytime drop, while not as intensive as Normandy for Ken, he said that September 29th and 30th were pretty tough due to the shelling by the Germans, still, many good men were lost and injured.

When he considered The Bulge, he just shook his head. He said that the snow, the cold, the frozen bodies of both sides, the shells bursting in the tree tops, dealing with the German tanks on Christmas, slugging through the snow for miles, and the fighting would never be forgotten. That was a hard battle for the troops, much less, without the proper winter equipment.

After the occupation of Germany and serving in General Dwight D. Eisenhower's honor guard at SHAEF Headquarters, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, Ken returned to the United States and was honorably discharged on November 10, 1945, at Camp Grant, Illinois. Ken reenlisted as a Master Sergeant in the Organized Reserve Corps, United States Army, on October 5, 1948, with reenlistment expiration to be three years hence.

While serving in the Army Reserve he was recalled to active duty on September 2, 1950, effective September 7, 1950, for twenty-one months and assigned to Headquarters, Percy Jones Army Hospital, Battle Creek Michigan. Upon evaluation of Ken's civilian skills and military record it was determined that the Primary MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) of Heavy Weapons Infantry Leader and the Secondary Military Occupational Specialty of Administrative Specialist applied in his individual case. He was assigned to the initial cadre of enlisted men for the reactivation of the hospital. Upon organizing the training office and establishing the groundwork for the Information and Education Program, he received a Commendation.

On February 15, 1951 Ken had volunteered for Ranger Training at the Ranger Training Center, Fort Benning, Georgia. On the 13th of March Ken received his orders for reassignment to the Ranger Training Center. He was assigned to the Headquarters Detachment, Ranger Training Command as First Sergeant for the training of new recruits. After his third jump on May 15th, Ken sustained an injury to his right eardrum, which was inoperative, and as a result he completed his points for separation from the service on July 29, 1951.

Ken's decorations and citations for World War II include the Combat Infantryman Badge, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart Medal with one Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, Parachute Badge, Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal, National Defense Service Medal, United States Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation, Europe-Africa Campaign Medal with four Bronze Battle Stars and one Bronze Invasion Arrowhead, one Service Stripe, three Overseas Service Bars, World War II Victory Medal, World War II Occupation Medal, Belgian Fourragere, Militaire Willems Orde Degree of Knight (Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army), the French Fourragere, and the Sharp Shooter Marksmanship Medal.

Ken's decorations and citations for October 1948 through July 1951 include a Letter of Commendation dated March 13, 1951 from Major Buel K. Fox, Chief, Personnel Division, Headquarters, Percy Jones Army Hospital, Battle Creek, Michigan; Letter of Commendation dated July 24, 1951 from Major Irving C. Pahl, Infantry, Commanding Headquarters Detachment, Ranger Training Command, Fort Benning, Georgia, and one service stripe.

Ken completed a total of 24 jumps including 22 training jumps and two combat jumps, (including the Normandy Invasion and the invasion of Holland)