

"The Greatest of the Greatest Generation"

Chapter III Occupation

June 10, 1945 to November 24, 1946

The Reims-Sissonne area was over-crowded. It had become a reconstitution center for the divisions badly mauled during the Battle of the Bulge. A general hospital had occupied the French Artillery Post the 508th PIR had vacated when it left to go fight in Belgium. Therefore, when the regiment returned to Sissonne it had to occupy tents.

The initial weeks in Sissonne were reasonably pleasant. For example, as the 508 men had existed on emergency rations during the Ardennes Campaign, everyone was authorized an additional ration.

Several regimental reviews (parades) and memorial ceremonies were conducted to honor lost comrades and to decorate heroes.

Replacements were welcomed into Hq1 and schooled in the processes and procedures unique to the operations of the company.

Fortunately, many of the replacements were experienced veterans from the 509th Airborne Battalion that had been depleted during the Battle of the Bulge.

The 508th PIR was still attached to the 82nd Airborne Division. However, it hadn't made a parachute jump since it parachuted into Holland on September 17, 1944. Therefore, a program of battalion sized jumps was implemented.

On March 14, the First Battalion combined with the Regimental Headquarters Company parachuted into an outstanding drop zone. However, as the parachutists in the lead planes of the formation were jumping, disaster struck. A plane at the rear of the formation threw a propeller and quickly lost altitude.

Descending, barely under control, the disabled plane began running into the parachutists still in the air that had jumped from earlier planes.

Chute after chute was snagged on the wings and tail section of the disabled plane as it plunged earthward, and burst into flames upon impact.

The parachutists in the disabled plane jumped safely. However, the aircraft crew of four died, and seven regimental Headquarters Company paratroopers were killed in the air.

Unrelated to the aircraft accident, but a great loss, Private Charles L Clemons (Hq1) was killed during the jump when his main and reserve parachutes malfunctioned.

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Additional replacements for Hq1 had arrived from England and required orientation to prepare them for combat. Accordingly, Hq1 implemented a vigorous training schedule. Concurrently, new weapons were issued to replace those damaged or destroyed during the Ardennes campaign.

On April 4, 1945, the 508th PIR's long attachment to the 82nd Airborne Division ended and the regiment came under the direct control of the First Allied Airborne Army.

The 508th PIR was immediately alerted to prepare to parachute near prisoner-of-war camps deep in Germany to liberate allied prisoners.

The regiment moved to airfields near Chartres, southwest of Paris to prepare for the mission.

Hq1 men had ample time to visit the fabled city of Paris. A great opportunity, as many men had not had a chance to visit the city and enjoy its culture (art museums, monuments, cathedrals, etc.). Although their combat equipment was kept alongside their bunks at the airfields, their Class A uniforms and shiny boots got the most wear.

After several weeks at the airfield with countless alerts, briefings and cancelled missions, the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. The world was not yet free from war – and many Hq1 men were concerned with a "rumor" that the 508th PIR would be sent to the Pacific to fight the Japanese.

The 508th PIR moved back to the Sissonne tent camp and waited for an assignment. It came quickly.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower had selected the 508th PIR for his security force and honor guards at his headquarters in Frankfurt-am-Main. Big sighs! The Pacific seemed further away – but so did home.

On June 10, 1945, the 508th PIR arrived in Frankfurt. It moved into apartments in Hedderheim, a suburb of Frankfurt. The US Military Government officials allowed the German residents of the apartments less than an hour to vacate their homes - permitting them to take only bedding and clothing. Each apartment contained a bedroom, living room, kitchen and bath. The Hq1 men were billeted two or three men to an apartment, and lived quite comfortably. The larger apartments had two or three bedrooms and housed more men.

The Hq1 men were quickly housebroken and domesticated. Officers or Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) making inspections often discovered men in their underwear busily ironing uniforms for guard duty or performing related housekeeping tasks.

The "privileged" Hq1 battalion staff section men had apartments above the company orderly room, next to the Battalion headquarters building.

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An Hq1 company and a Battalion headquarters sign was procured on the "black market" by an anonymous member of Hq1 for a few packs of cigarettes.

Note the grave outside the Hq1 orderly room door. A Duty Officer discovered a very senior, highly decorated NCO with a bottle of Spanish Brandy ("Franco's Revenge") in his quarters – a serious offense. Rather than reduce the NCO as required, the Company Commander (CO) offered to "take care of the problem" providing, that when he arrived for duty the next morning, a six-foot hole had been dug outside the orderly room door.



The "hole" was dug; the bottle of brandy deposited therein, and the hole was filled up. End of serious problem. Not Quite!

A day after the incident, the CO was surprised to find the hole was now a "grave" carefully marked with white stones, and a tombstone like marker.



The NCO will remain anonymous in this album. Nobody wants to destroy a 35-year outstanding service record.

However, some of us often wonder? Did the NCO really dig that hole? Who helped with the stones, and who made the sign? Also, someone ought to tell that German that mows the lawn about that aged bottle of Spanish Brandy underfoot. The sign reads:

IN MEMORY

Here Lies a bottle of
"Franco's Revenge"

Found in the quarters of
two men in this Company
in violation of Regt. Reg.

The "Occupation" mission of the 508th PIR was security of the Supreme Headquarters located in the I.G. Farben Building and outlying areas.

One battalion guarded the barbed wire enclosed Farben Building, including the interior. Another battalion patrolled the nearby towns of Oberusel, Bad Homburg, and Konigstein.

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These towns contained German estates and large manor houses commandeered by the Military Government to house the 190 plus General officers assigned to the headquarters.

The remaining battalion provided honor guard formations, performed special security missions, and implemented training schedules. Every few weeks the three battalions rotated assignments.

The photo [at right] shows Hq1 men marching to assume responsibility for security of the outer perimeter of the I. G. Farben building.



The small white building is the Guard Post -- the only entry to the Farben Building and area. Most Heads of State and Senior Military Officials passed through this portal under the watchful eyes of 508th PIR paratroopers.

The important military men in Europe constantly observed the men of the 508th PIR. Therefore, military bearing and conduct became paramount objectives. Many hours were devoted to military drill and posture, manual of arms, and related "parade ground" activities.



Hq1 Men Participating in a Formal Guard Mount

Occupation duty was not all hard work. Clubs were established in the 508th PIR area, and the Hq1 men enjoyed many hours

therein. The Hq1 bachelors especially enjoyed exciting times in the clubs while the married men busily wrote letters to loved ones at home!

The 508th PIR commander and officers frequently and proudly accepted accolades and praise from senior officers such as General Eisenhower and General Patton about the conduct, appearance and efficiency of the 508th PIR paratroopers.



The bachelors entertained the Women's Army Corps (WACs). These women provided clerical and communications support for Gen. "Ike's" headquarters.

Notwithstanding the praise and comfortable living conditions, the question

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upper most in the minds of Hq1 men was: "When do we go home?"

A theatre-wide eligibility system for rotation had been established. A man earned one point for each month of service overseas, five points for each battle star or decoration, and twelve points for each child. An eligibility goal of 85 points was established for shipment home.

The first 508th PIR group left for home under the point system while the regiment was still in France. However, as men accrued additional points when awards and decorations were published in orders, the departure of Hq1 men accelerated.

Many of the original 508th PIR men, the Camp Blanding veterans, missed the regimental Third Anniversary celebration in October 1945 as they had gone home.

Christmas 1945 in Frankfurt was not all it had been for most men at home, but it was considerably better than the Christmas of 1944 when the regiment executed a perilous night withdrawal from the Salm River in Belgium.

On November 24, 1946 – four years, one month and four days after it was activated at Camp Blanding, Florida, the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment passed into history at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

We Served Proudly!