

James J. (Mac) McMahon – Private to Sergeant

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Communications Platoon from October 20, 1942 to October 13, 1945.

James McMahon performed outstandingly as the Battalion Wire Chief, a dangerous function that often required exposure to enemy observation and fire.

Mac is an Hq1 “Hells Half Acre” survivor (See Chapter II, Combat Operations – Normandy).

Mac is a distinguished member of the “Greatest of the Greatest Generation.”



Mac was one of the quietest men in Hq1. Now after sixty years, he is still reluctant to discuss his wartime experiences and accomplishments. His WW II comrades recall that he performed his duties efficiently, often without direction, always without supervision, and consistently under the most dangerous battlefield conditions.

As Chief of the battalion wire section, Mac was responsible for the operational efficiency of the wire communications systems connecting the battalion headquarters with the frontline rifle companies.

Mac maintained continuous surveillance of this highly vulnerable network that was often disrupted by enemy patrols or artillery fire.

These frequent wire breaks had to be quickly located and repaired or the wire replaced. Locating and repairing these breaks, required that Mac and his few men operate day and night, in all weather, often exposed to enemy small arms and artillery fire.

James (Mac) McMahon entered the service October 14, 1942. He was immediately sent to Camp Upton, NY where he volunteered for airborne training. Mac was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida, assigned to the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508th PIR).

The regiment was established by the Army to determine the feasibility of sending entire units through the Parachute School at Fort Benning, GA rather than continue having individuals qualify as parachutists and then assigning them to airborne units.

Mac received basic infantry training and concurrently completed the first phase of parachutist training. The latter consisted of miles of running, hand-to-hand fighting; thousands of pushups and the many unique ways created by a cadre of qualified parachutists to physically strengthen the recruit's resolve to become parachutists.

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The Hq1 recruits prevailed and went to the parachute school, made their five jumps with parachutes that they had meticulously packed, and proudly pinned on the coveted parachute wings.

After a short furlough, Mac's first days off since October 1942, he moved with the 508th PIR to Camp Mackall, NC.

Mac says. "At Camp Mackall, we had advanced infantry training, and learned more about parachute jumping and airborne operations. We also learned a new skill that the Sergeants called "beautification of the area." Just plain pick and shovel work, grass cutting, picking up trash, etc. We applied this skill several times in Europe when we occupied tent camps in Nottingham, England and Sissonne, France.

After large-scale maneuvers in Tennessee, and another short pass, we packed up and moved from Camp Mackall to Camp Shanks, NY.

On December 28, 1943, we boarded the James Parker and sailed to Belfast, Ireland.

In Belfast, we had several weeks of weapons qualification and training, a lot of marching, and some field exercises. Then the regiment moved to Nottingham, England and occupied tents in a King's Deer Park.

I did not meet any of Robin Hood's descendents but my comrades told me that there were many of Maid Marion's decadents in Nottingham - a wonderful city within walking distance of our camp.

Following several months of arduous training including two night parachute jumps and field exercises, we boarded trucks and moved to the Folkingham Air Base.

After many briefings, equipment inspections, and farewells to comrades, we boarded C-47s and were told we would drop into Normandy, France, a few hours before the seaborne assault forces landed.

On July 12, 1944, I moved with the 508th PIR survivors to Utah Beach where after a short delay we boarded LST's, and sailed to England. We were given a heroe's welcome in Nottingham and mourned those that we had left in France.

A few months later on September 17, 1944, we parachuted into Holland, and fought in and around the city of Nijmegen. On November 11, 1944 we marched out of Holland to the town of Oss; Holland (over 22 miles with all equipment) and rendezvoused with trucks that moved us to Sissonne, France.

Sissonne was good. Warm dry beds in a French Artillery Post, plenty of hot food, showers, and not much training. A few fortunate men got passes to Paris.

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The good life ended December 17, 1944. The Germans had launched a furious attack through the Ardennes to capture the English Channel ports. We were alerted to get ready to move and confront them.

Early in the morning of December 18, we loaded into large open trucks, and rode for hours in the bitter cold to Werbomont, Belgium. Where we established a hasty defensive position for the night.

Without winter clothing, equipment or shelter - we fought the Germans to a standstill,

On January 7, 1945, we launched a massive counter-attack. Despite the bitter cold and deep snow, we attacked through the densely forested Ardennes and the heavily fortified Siegfried line.

In March, our regiment was relieved and we returned to Sissonne. We held memorial services for our lost comrades, welcomed replacements, conducted field exercises, and made a practice parachute jump.

On April 3, 1945, we moved to airports south of Paris. The 508th PIR was prepared to jump near German prisoner-of-war camps to rescue allied prisoners. However, in May, the war in Europe ended and we returned to Sissonne to await orders. Our wait was short.

The 508th PIR was selected by General Eisenhower to provide the security force and honor guard for his Frankfurt, Germany headquarters. I completed my wartime service in Hedderheim, Germany, wearing the white scarf and gloves of the security force and honor guard."

Sergeant James McMahon was an exceptionally outstanding soldier and noncommissioned officer. He was a loyal, trustworthy, reliable comrade, and a cherished friend.

James McMahon's awards and decorations included:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal w/oak leaf cluster
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? European African Middle Eastern Theatre of Operations (ETO) medal with an Invasion Arrowhead and four battle stars
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation
- ?? French and Belgian Fourrageres
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals including. the Occupational Medal with Germany Bar

James J. McMahon resides at 45 Knoll Terrace, Hazlet. NJ 07730

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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.

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George Stoket

Hq1 Album Collator