



~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Richard “Dick” Adams

Richard (Dick) Adams was born in New York City on 21 July 1922. His father served as a Sergeant in WWI and a Colonel in Army Ordnance during WWII.



Dick at a spry 89

Dick was inducted into the Army in 1943. After Basic Training at Ft. Benning, GA, and some time with the ASTP and the 20th Armored Division, Dick volunteered for jump training at Ft. Benning. In October of 1944 he was shipped to New Guinea, then to Leyte and ultimately to Mindoro. He and the other replacements were scheduled to join the 11th Airborne, but Col. Jones, CO of the 503rd, had other ideas. Dick was assigned to HQ Company 3rd Bn in an 81mm mortar platoon. On 16 February 1945 he jumped onto the Corregidor golf course, and ended up in a tree in Crockett Ravine. He spent a good part of the first day getting injured troopers to the aid station.

When General MacArthur returned to Corregidor on 6 March, Dick was there. He is in the background (red arrow) of this picture of MacArthur in a Jeep. The picture is on display in the museum on Corregidor.



After the Negros campaign and occupation duty in Japan, Dick returned home and joined the National Guard as Operations Sergeant in the 165th Inf. and left the Guard after 20 years as a Master Sergeant.

Dick has a law degree from St. John University and is retired from General Motors. It was at GM that he met his wife of 34 years, Nancy. They have two daughters. Kim, age 31, is a preschool drama teacher. She is

married and lives in Fenton, MI with her husband, Christian. Alyson, age 29, is a Captain in the Air Force, stationed at Hurlburt Field in Florida. Dick and Nancy live in Farmington Hills, MI with Dakota (Rottweiler), Cole (cat) and Heidi (African gray parrot). All are healthy and happy.

In 2012 Dick returned to Corregidor with his wife and two daughters. They were fortunate to be accompanied by a group of people very knowledgeable about Corregidor and WWII in the Philippines. Included in the group were Steve and Marcia Kwiecinski, who live on the Rock and conduct private and group tours (Steve's dad was a defender of Corregidor and was a POW). Peter Parsons, writer, director and producer of video documentaries, came to interview Dick for a documentary he is working on. Peter was a child in 1941 living in Manila, and has vivid memories of that time. He currently lives on Luzon. He is the son of Navy Commander Chick Parsons who organized and directed the missions to supply and assist the guerrilla resistance movement in the Philippines. Also there was Carl Welteke, a retired Navy diver who lives in Subic Bay and has explored nearly every inch of Corregidor and Bataan, accompanied by John Moffitt, an extraordinary photographer who documents everything with his camera. Rounding out the group was Paul Whitman, author, lawyer and webmaster for the 503rd Heritage Battalion website.

Remembering the trip, Dick wrote:

“The Rock once again is a lush tropical island with beautiful sunsets and panoramic views of Bataan. But, protruding from the carpet of green are the grey stone memories that I recall when I think about February, 1945. The Mile-Long Barracks, the curved line of the officer's quarters, the buildings at Middleside, Malinta Hill, the dock at Bottomside, the road around Malinta Hill toward Monkey Point are all lined with memories in spite of their green covering. The parade ground is still there minus the shell holes, but the golf course is unrecognizable...no shell holes or blown-off trees, just waist high green. The lighthouse, two water tanks and the old white metal flag pole still stand.”



Trooper Dick Adams





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Raymond Morris Basham

Raymond Morris Basham was born January 25, 1923, in Bowling Green, KY. Ray lived there with his mother, father, who was a city fireman, four sisters and two brothers. He was educated in the city school system, enjoyed hunting and fishing, and worked hard at riding his bicycle through the city streets delivering the daily newspaper.



Medic Ray

From reading those daily papers that he delivered he said, *"I knew the war was coming"*, so at 17 he joined the Army National Guard and in January 1941, he volunteered for active duty. He was sent to Camp Shelby, MS. He liked the Army life but after the War started in Dec. 1941, he became unhappy with the unit he was assigned to because, as he stated, *"They could not pass on inspection"*. When the Army requested volunteers for the new elite paratrooper units he eagerly volunteered and was assigned in July 1941 to the 503rd at Ft. Benning, GA for paratrooper training. After completing training there he was assigned to advanced training at Ft. Bragg, NC. The 503rd sailed for Australia on Oct. 1942 aboard the now infamous Poelau Laut. The trip took 42 days of hardship for the troopers aboard. The troops had only two meals per day and poor at that. The sleeping areas were crowded and many soldiers were sick which made living conditions miserable. Ray said that many hot nights he would sleep on topside with only a blanket in order to have some fresh air to breathe. Needless to say he and all were glad to reach Australia on Dec. 2, 1942. He said the Australian people were kind and generous people who greeted them with good food and hospitality.

After jungle war training in Australia the 503rd started their war campaign in the Pacific. Ray jumped at Markham Valley and was wounded at Noemfoor. A blast came far too close and knocked him unconscious. While at the field hospital being treated for a concussion and burst ear drum, the doctors told him he would be headed home but after two weeks he was sent back to his unit. Ray was awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds.

He served with the 503rd during the Corregidor invasion and was greatly disappointed because he did not get to jump on Corregidor. The casualties were so great the

first day he and his Co. B were sent ashore in navy boats on Feb. 17th. The recapture of Corregidor came at a high price for the 503rd, and for Ray who was a medic, the worst was the explosion at Monkey Point. He and fellow soldiers at their commanders' orders had just moved to the bottom of the hill when it exploded. He thought he was dead and when he discovered that he was not, he began doing his best to help the other soldiers who were wounded. He was surrounded by soldiers who had been with him the entire war who were mortally wounded. Ray was present when his Commander Jones presented the return of The Fortress of Corregidor to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and the American flag was raised. It was a proud day.

The Army points system sent Ray home in July of 1945, and he was discharged at Camp Antebury, IN, on August 3, 1945. Ray returned home and by Oct. 23, 1945, had married the girl left behind, Mary Katherine Basham. They have two daughters and two sons.

Ray spent many years working in the construction business and built many businesses, homes, and numerous buildings on the campus of Western Kentucky University at Bowling Green, KY. He retired from the FMC Co. at the age of 62 and now enjoys the retired life with his wife at Rockfield, KY.



Ray loves his country and is a true patriot. The flag flies in his front yard daily. For him, it will always be, *"All the Way"*.

Ray...one of the first paratroopers

Airborne!





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



CHARLES E. "CHUCK" BREIT

Charles E. Breit (Chuck), was born December 25, 1925, in Philadelphia, PA. At age 17 he enlisted in the Army in May, 1943. He took his basic training at Camp Croft, SC, during which time he volunteered for the paratroopers. Chuck started jump school at Ft. Benning, GA in early 1944, and upon completion volunteered for demolition training (at age 16 he had prior experience in demolitions working for the Cleveland Wrecking Company in Philadelphia and Camden, NJ).



Dapper Chuck

In October 1944, he shipped overseas to New Guinea where he joined the 503rd PRCT. He then went to Mindoro, Philippines, where he was assigned to Regt. Hdq. Co., demolition platoon. Then Corregidor. Chuck's job there was demolition and he was a flame-thrower man. He landed in a shell hole right in front of the long barracks which was his mission to secure. Upon landing the demolition groups gathered together and did just that. After two weeks of bitter fighting the island was secured by the Rock Force. Chuck was proud to serve as one of General MacArthur's honor guards along with his assistant flame-thrower, Johnnie Banks. He was there to watch (then) Col. Jones say to General MacArthur, ***"Sir, I present you the fortress Corregidor."***

After Chuck landed he marked the spot and later was able to retrieve his chute and sent it home with a wounded comrade, Cpl. Vincent A. Minkler. It now stands in the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, GA, where it is a memorial to all the members of the 503 who jumped on Corregidor Island. Returning to Corregidor 50 years later with his wife Dee, he found the shell hole still there. *"Cold chills and deja vu indeed,"* he thought.

After his discharge on February 10, 1946, Chuck joined with a 17th airborne vet and formed an air show, *"Bobby Ward's Sky Devils,"* which lasted about three years. Utilizing his paratrooper training he performed delayed drops, wing walking and other stunts at fairs and carnivals all across the country. His partner had been an automobile stunt driver prior to the war so that was added to their repertoire. They then joined *"Kochman's*

World Champion Hell Drivers" performing head-on collisions, ice crashes and numerous other stunts. Chuck also doubled for Clark Gable in one of his movies.

The show wintered in Miami, FL, and in 1952 Chuck met another ex-paratrooper from the European theatre who was working as a painter of radio and t.v. towers. Now ready to leave the road and wanting a warm climate, they joined forces and in 1952 he founded *"Breit's Tower Service."* BTS remains the oldest tower company in the southeast today under the direction of his son.

Chuck retired in 1996, and he and Dee were finally able to leave the Miami life in the fast lane to a place in west central Florida on a beautiful river. He stays very busy with home renovation projects and restoration of their 1940 45' ELCO yacht upon which they lived for 25 years in Coconut Grove, FL.

Chuck has stayed active and involved in the 503rd PRCT Association WWII, serving as national president from 1991-1993, and again from 2006-2008, and is a current board member. He is also the Deep South Chapter president and has been for 6 years. Chuck and Dee have a contented life and enjoy travel and visits from old friends.

Interesting anecdote regarding Chuck:

My wife was standing next to me when I opened the envelope with Chuck's brief bio and photos. Before reading his bio, she picked up his photos and looked at this picture of him in his chute and said, *"He looks like Clark Gable!"* Ed



Chuck, driving the girls crazy!

All the Way!





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Anthony "Tony" Cicchino

Following is some brief background information about my life.

At seventeen I joined the army and did my basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina. From there I went to Fort Benning, Georgia for parachute training. Following five weeks of parachute training, two weeks later I was on my way to join the 503rd RCT, in New Guinea. I served in the Service Company my entire time with the 503rd.

After returning stateside I held several jobs, but I was not at my best. I reenlisted and was posted to Europe for four years.



Paratrooper Tony

Following discharge from the army, I went to work as a vending machine repairman until 1957. I then bought a liquor bar in New Jersey, and in 1962 I sold the business and moved to Florida where I went back into the liquor industry where I remained until 1980, when I retired.

My wife and I traveled a lot until she passed away in 2008.

Today I'm retired and living in Boynton, Beach, Florida with my friend Theresa Poklop.



Tony embarking on a life's journey like no other

Once a Paratrooper....Always a Paratrooper



Tony, far right, with his buddies. Those daring young men in their jumping machines. Airborne!





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



James Mullaney

Jim Mullaney was born August 14, 1920 in Louisville, Kentucky. His family consisted of one brother and three sisters. His brother was five years older than him and two of his sisters were older. All are deceased now.

Jim's brother died in a Japanese prison Camp on February 3, 1945 in Japan. He was on two of the Japanese "Hell Ships" transporting prisoners from Subic Bay to the home islands to prevent their rescue by the advancing American forces. The 503rd was on Corregidor about the time of the Japanese ship sinkings. *"So close and yet so far,"* says Jim.

Jim went to Louisville Male High School and got his first taste of the military in their ROTC. After graduating he joined the army reserve. It was 1939. He was called to active duty in January 1942 - three weeks after Pearl Harbor.

He was sent to Fort Benning (Harmony Church Area) for a refresher course. An officer interviewed anyone who might be interested in the Airborne. After seeing the paratroopers in training there he became more than interested, and wondered if he might be good enough to someday be one of them.

After completing the "refresher course" he received orders to report to Lawson Field for Jump School; Class 18A - April 1942. Jim completed jump school in early May 1942, then proceeded to Fort Bragg where he joined the 503rd Parachute Battalion. There were no regiments then.

A short time later - about two weeks - the 503rd Regiment came into existence. Jim was assigned to "H" Company and stayed with the Company for the entire war.

On October 10, 1942, he left Bragg and took a train ride to Camp Stoneman in California. After about a week there he and his buddies were taken to San Francisco and boarded a Dutch Ship, manned by Dutch officers with a *Java-neese* crew (people from Java). They sailed to Panama where they picked up the 501st Battalion and headed west for Australia. *"We saw neither ship nor plane till reaching Brisbane about 32 days later,"* says Jim.

Anchored in the harbor for about a day, they then headed north in the Great Barrier Reef to Cairns, Australia. Upon disembarking, the Australian army took them by trucks about twenty miles south, where they parked alongside a road with dense jungle on each side where they camped, sleeping on the ground that night.

Jim and his fellow paratroopers erected tents and were there for the next several months. *"Strange land - even stranger animals - snakes too - bandicoots - wallabys - kangaroos. And thousands of exotic birds."* Jim recalls. They spent several months there conducting endless training in ungodly heat and rain. Several people went to the front in New Guinea during this period. In August they were shipped out to Port Moresby.



They prepared for their first combat jump on the north side of the island at Nadzab in the Markham Valley. After the jump, and their first taste of combat, Jim and his buddies returned to Port Moresby for more training and many new replacements.

"We moved around the island - went to the north side - Buna - Gona - Dobadura - and then to Dutch New Guinea and landed on the beaches of Hollandia," says Jim. They were stationed near Cyclops airfield.

The 503rd PIR conducted patrols almost daily and prepared for the Noemfoor Island jump which they made on July 4, 1944. They spent several months on hellish patrols in the muddy paths of that hellish island. *"On one patrol three 'H' Company men were eaten by the Japs. But that's another story,"* Jim says.

The 503rd pretty well conquered the island by late August. They then prepared for the Philippines. They boarded a ship which was part of the largest convoy Jim had ever seen. They landed at Leyte Island but didn't leave the beach, where day and night they had a ringside seat to the Japanese suicide planes sinking their ships offshore.

Soon, Jim and his men were alerted to move to Mindoro Island - about ninety miles south of Manila. They landed on the beach at Mindoro in late December, where for the next few weeks they witnessed the largest air battles they ever saw.

The night after Christmas a Japanese cruiser sat offshore lobbing star shells over their dug-in positions. One explosive round hit their area but was a dud. It was thirty-two inches long and eight inches in diameter. *"Lucky it was a dud or I wouldn't be here today,"* quips Jim. Things then calmed down.

They were given replacements - men and weapons - watches - anything they wanted. They knew something very big was in the offing. Even the food improved.

It was a short flight to Manila Bay and Corregidor. Jim and his buddies made the famous combat jump at 8 a.m., February 16, 1945. **Jim, an original jumper** A fourth jump was called off on Negros Island which had fallen into allied hands. They took a very short barge ride to Negros from Panay.

"I was there until November 1945, and received orders to journey home. After several days on Leyte I boarded a ship called the 'Hugh Rodman' and headed for home sweet home. Got there in early December. God Bless America."





~ HONORED WWII 503rd PRCT GUEST ~



Tony N. Sierra



Proud 503rd Paratrooper Tony

I am honored to be asked to participate in this endeavor. Being a trooper of the 503rd has been the highlight of my life.

I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and brought to Phoenix, Arizona as a baby. I grew up in very humble circumstances. My single mother worked all her life as a washer-woman and housekeeper to the 'ritzies' in Arizona to support me and my two brothers and my sister.

I joined the army when I was seventeen, the war just having started. I was ordered to Camp Roberts, California for basic infantry training. At Camp Roberts two paratroopers set up shop in the cafeteria to recruit new jumpers. When I saw them in their dress jump suits and the trimmings, mainly the wings, I was instantly sold. Of course, they emphasized that my choices were very limited; either I do nothing AND BE ASSIGNED TO ONE OF THE INFANTRY DIVISIONS BEING ORGANIZED AT THAT TIME, OR BE SELECTIVE

AND JOIN THE CREAM OF THE CROP... THE U.S. PARATROOPERS.

When I arrived at Benning I was at first concerned I would be unable to compete with others and do the things one does to train and harden for the troopers. But once I started I loved it and hardened mentally as well as physically, to finally end up a proud trooper of the 503rd.

Additionally, I was in time able to prod my younger brother to also go to Benning; he ended up with the 101st Airborne Division, jumping on D-Day -- another proud trooper in the Sierra family.

As the years have passed my fellow troopers have become my family, and I cannot imagine what my life would have been if I had never become one of them.



**Before Corregidor
combat jump**

I loved the 503rd and all the men I've met over the decades. It is a sad thing, but we know all things must come to an end. Very few 503rd men are left, but I don't for one minute forget any of those who were my brothers.

Sincerely,

Tony N. Sierra
Second Squad, Third Platoon
D Company, 2nd Battalion
503rd Regimental Combat Team



Tony, second from right in back row, with his squad in New Guinea.





~ OPERATION CORREGIDOR II ~

Tony Geishauser

Moderator



After three and a half years in the US Marine Corps Reserve and attending college in Maine, Tony was bored with college and wanted adventure flying helicopters in Vietnam in 1966. It didn't matter that he had never seen a helicopter up close and personal before that time. The Army radio ads were doing their job and enticed him to sign up and be all he could be.



Tony Geishauser
Major (Ret)
Cowboys

Tony was lucky enough to be assigned to Company A, 82nd Aviation Battalion - known as the "Cowboys." Based out of Bien Hoa, Vietnam, their primary mission was to fly combat and support missions for the 173d Airborne Brigade.

On Tony's first combat flight in Vietnam, he was flying in a flight of four helicopters with his best friend from flight school in the helicopter behind him. Just before landing at a "secured" LZ, Tony's flight was taken under fire by a lone VC firing an AK-47. The helicopter in front of him was hit and the one with his friend, Jim, in it was hit. Tony soon found out his friend was shot in the head and killed instantly on his first flight.

Tony went on to support his beloved "Sky Soldiers" after that tragic first flight. The largest battle he was a part of was on Operation Silver City in the jungles of War Zone "D". His helicopter was loaded with hot A rations for the 2/503d which was located in an LZ area called Zulu Zulu. Unknown by anyone at the time, the battalion was surrounded by nearly 2,000 VC and NVA regulars.

Tony's helicopter was shot down almost as soon as it arrived which began an epic battle where upwards of 500 NVA and VC were killed to the 2/503d's 11 KIA and nearly 200 WIA.

Tony retired as a major and a Master Army Aviator and has had a successful Public Relations and Media relations career in Texas.



Tony, a young chopper pilot in Vietnam, 1966.

Tony will be moderating the meeting with WWII 503rd troopers in Lexington, as he did at the 173d reunion in N. Myrtle Beach in 2010.



Tony's bird at its final resting place.

Note: At the 173d reunion in Ft. Worth years ago Tony made a speech during a reception for 2/503d troopers. In reference to 'spilling our eggs' at Zulu-Zulu, he stated, "*Cowboys may be late sometimes, but we always deliver,*" upon which he presented us with 300 coupons for free breakfast at MacDonald's.



"THREE FLASHLITES ON CORREGIDOR"

Louis G. Aiken, Sr.

(Photo & story courtesy of the 503rd Heritage Battalion web site)



There were not many incidents that were actually funny during the Corregidor operation of February 1945. However there was one incident that I have remembered down through the years that was funny when it occurred and I laugh every time I think of it or tell it to someone else.

This situation or incident occurred not too long after the First Battalion arrived on the island. We in B Company were assigned an area to search out, reconnoiter etc., off Topside on the Ft. Drum side of the island.

Lt. Wirt Cates, a very good officer, was "B" Company CO and Lt. Raymond Barnowsky was a platoon leader. We had covered a good bit of the area assigned, caves etc. and had found no evidence of live enemy. The company came to a stop on a trail and I could tell there was some kind of a discussion going on at or near the entrance of a cave. Shortly Lt. Barnowsky started back down the trail, stopping periodically to discuss something as he progressed toward my squad and platoon. He finally reached my position and asked if I or any member of the platoon had any flashlites. I stated that I didn't know, but however I would inquire. I asked him who wanted the flashlites and just what was their intended use, hell it was broad daylight.

He explained to me that Lt. Cates had come upon a cave with quite a large opening or crawl area. Lt. Cates, it seems, believed that this particular cave had the potential of being a storage area as it developed into the mountain or rock formation of the island, and he wanted to explore this possibility but to do so required the use of flashlites. His specific request was for three (3) flashlites and he had directed Lt. Barnowsky to locate at least three (3) flashlites. Basically this is what Lt. Barnowski explained to me in answer to the question I has asked.

When he had finished explaining to me what the situation was he paused a second and stated,

"You know Sgt. Aiken, he (Lt Cates) evidently intends to hold a flashlite in each hand and put one on his pistol belt, because I sure as hell don't intend to go into that cave with him".



503rd troopers on *The Rock*. The early Tunnel Rats.

I looked at ole Barnowsky for a second and I burst out laughing as did several others near us. Lt. Barnowsky just grinned and moved on searching for flashlites.

Yes, he found the three (3) and yes, Lt. Cates and someone else, not Lt. Barnowsky, entered the cave or crawl area of the cave. Yes, there was a Jap or Japs in the cave and shortly after entering the cave Lt. Cates and whoever it was with him came out very hurriedly. Wm. Arris can probably give you a better description as to why they came out very *fast*, he was much closer to the situation than I was.

I think white phosphorous grenades were introduced into the cave and one lone Jap soldier banzied "B" CO of the 503 RCT, and as he cleared the mouth of the cave he charged with a broken Samurai sword. He was quickly relieved of his assignment and his broken sword. Best I can remember his body was placed in the mouth of the cave and this became his burial place.

If Capt. Wirt Cates, (KIA on Banana Hill - Negros Island late April or early May 1945), and Lt. Raymond Barnowsky, deceased, were here with us today, I feel certain they would both join in a hearty laugh about the Three Flashlights on Corregidor, February 1945.

Actually I talked with Barnowsky via telephone several years prior to his death and we both had a good laugh about this particular incident.

May "The Good Lord" let them both rest in peace.

**Louis G Aiken, Sr.
Co. "B" 503 PIR RCT
June 42-Oct 45**



Taking the Gloves Off – Our Warriors Deserve Better

Recognizing the increasing needs of American Veterans following two exhausting wars, this administration has worked diligently to provide our veterans with the services and support they both deserve and need.

In 2010, this administration proposed to increase the VA Budget from \$98 billion to \$113 billion, a massive 14% increase in VA funding. This was the largest budget increase that the VA had EVER received.

With the largest increase in history, the VA vowed that there would be NO new programs for returning veterans and no expansion of current programs, instead indicating that the increases would go to refurbishing old facilities, building new facilities and providing incentive bonuses to mid-level managers.

Subsequently, veterans who wait long periods for access to existing programs and veterans seeking to get into resident PTSD programs would not see improvements in their wait times. Veterans seeking medications like Lexapro, which have through valid research, demonstrated increased efficacy over standard antidepressants will not be available to our veterans due to cost.

The administration's generously allocated resources in a time when other organization budgets are being cut, has done nothing to decrease the over 1,000,000 disability claims which are now in arrears and yet to be settled....yes, that's one million veterans and family members waiting for support. Claimants who, on appeal wait over three years for any resolution, have coined a new motto for the VA, ***"Apply, Deny and Wait Until you Die"***.

This administration's proposed budget for 2011 again increased VA funding by massive amounts, from \$113 billion (another 10%) to \$125 billion, with a focus on impacting homelessness and improving claims processing, while female veterans are becoming homeless at a rate faster than their male counterparts. The administration's proposed budget for 2013, **another 10% increase**, is dedicated to reducing access times to care, decreasing claims waiting times, improving technology and ending homelessness.

We currently have a completed homeless female veteran's facility which was scheduled for completion in the Summer of 2011 sitting vacant in Cocoa, FL, while homeless female veterans remain on the street.

The number of claims in arrears have continued to climb beyond 1,000,000 and the DAV now projects that by the year 2015, the backlog will exceed 2,000,000. This administration's 2012 budget provides yet another large increase, from \$125 billion to \$132 billion (9.5% increase), aimed at suicide prevention research and constructing new facilities. (Perhaps seeing mental health patients in a timely manner and regularly and addressing their claim's issues would help with the reduction of suicides).

The administration's proposed budget for 2013 is dedicated to reduce access times to care, decrease claims waiting times, improve technology and end homelessness. Sounds like a broken record doesn't it?

Sum it up. That's over a 43.5% increase in four years.

How much more money will Congress have to throw at the VA before we see some measurable results? Patients are waiting months for initial mental health appointments and then seen every several months. Recently, I met a two-star Admiral who was denied care at the VA because *"he didn't have a disability"*. His response was, *"That is why I was here....to find out if I had a disability."* Now if *he* is having difficulty, imagine the trouble our young enlisted soldiers are experiencing.

And what about all of that money going to Construction? Try this one on for size.

Orlando's Lake Nona VA Medical Center Debacle

In April of 2010 I first wrote about the Lake Nona VA project being built that would service veterans in Central Florida. Our concerns then as now, have been that contractors were cheating workers out of the Davis-Bacon wages that they were entitled to by federal law.



New Orlando area VA hospital under construction

(continued....)



In short, contractors were breaking the law and any construction workers worth their salt would not allow themselves to be cheated thereby leaving the hospital to be built by unskilled and untrained workers. In fact the general contractor was found to be hiring and protecting undocumented workers as evidenced by an ICE raid where a company's supervisors were hiding those undocumented workers on the jobsite.

Since very few skilled workers were hired for this project in the first place, this led to a shoddy and poorly built facility which in turn will degrade the level of care that our veterans will receive when the hospital is finally opened. It was scheduled to open this year but VA officials have tentatively rescheduled for summer 2013 "at the earliest". We in the Building Trades had and continue to try and inform VA officials on the jobsite about what is happening under their very noses. VA project managers are tasked with all compliance matters on the job, but from the very start, did not seem interested in acting on the information we had provided them.

Now, over two years into the project, the hospital is way behind schedule with reports of shoddy workmanship that has resulted in massive flooding inside the building. Sitting water has created mold throughout the building, including inside ventilation systems. Once the hospital becomes operational, any patients housed there may be exposed to the mold spores flowing through the ventilation system. Is this how the contractors and the VA project managers show their respect and gratitude towards veterans who sacrificed so much for America?

Building a large quality facility on time and on budget is not impossible. We did it beautifully with the \$200 million renovation project at Tripler Army Medical Center, Hawaii in 1983, delivered ahead of time and below budget. The VA's solution to the Lake Nona debacle and cost overruns is to cut one third of the hospital's beds at the expense of our veterans care and delay the project. VA Project managers and oversight managers need to be held accountable for their inability to effectively manage our valuable tax resources and may need to be dismissed now.

OUR VETERANS DESERVE BETTER!

The VA is broken and refuses to effectively manage the resources with which it is entrusted as it meanders along a bureaucratic course, which robs our dedicated veterans of the care they deserve. Throwing massive amounts of the federal budget dollars at the VA has NOT produced measurable results.

It is long past the time for ALL GOOD SOLIDERS to call upon our legislators to begin to disassemble this behemoth juggernaut and provide veterans with the

vouchers they need to get the quality of care they deserve in the civilian community. Pilot programs need to be established aimed at contracting and outsourcing services, establishing measurable competition and transitioning care to the agencies which can best serve our veterans with up-to-date treatments at the most efficient cost. Not-for-profit programs (501 c (3)) programs have demonstrated remarkable treatment efficacy and cost effectiveness in this regard. Congress should carve out resources for the many organizations who have demonstrated the efficacy.

What other kind of an organization are you aware of that can get a 43.5% budget increase over four years and continue to ignore it's identified goals? If this were a private business, it would be bankrupt. The only ones bankrupted in this case are the veterans who fail to get the benefits and care they deserve.

Congressmen and Representatives need your feedback. Write them now!

Although there are many dedicated employees and providers within the VA System, specifically the high quality of medical care which is provided locally, the problems at the bureaucratic and administrative levels appear insurmountable.

Scott Fairchild, Psy.D
LTC USA (Ret)
82ND ABN DIV

Dr. Fairchild is a licensed psychologist who operates Baytree Behavioral Health in Melbourne, FL and was the Founder and Co-Director of the Stress, Trauma and Acute Response (STAR) Team for Kennedy Space Center. Additionally, he was a Co-Founder of Welcome Home Vets, Inc., a not-for-profit organization to support returning Florida veterans with their transition and reintegration into the community. Doc Scott has treated numerous Sky Soldiers from throughout the country which, in turn, has helped to support their PTSD claims with the VA. The Doc did much of the early research on PTSD for the Army at Walter Reed.



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INCOMING!



~ The Hammer ~

In the April newsletter (Page 43), was included was a picture and short report about 1st Sgt Jackson, "The Hammer". Thank you. He was my 1st Sgt when I was assigned to C/2nd/503d Inf., 173d Abn Bde (Sep) on Okinawa. I remember being told that 1st Sgt Jackson was the military heavyweight boxing champ when he was stationed in Germany. Thank you again for including someone in our newsletter who I previously knew.



Dwight Schalles
C/2/503d

Dwight: I didn't know that about The Hammer, but I'd sure believe it. Every one of us who served with 1st Sgt. Jackson know he was a hellofa leader of men. Who out there knows about his *knockout* abilities?

B Company Photo?

It might just be me, but I don't remember those tables in the rubber trees (cover photo, Issue 39 below). If I'm right, it might belong to A or C Company. Ol' Ranger Roy (Lombardo) was anxious to be the first company out of the trees, and into what would become Camp Zinn. B Company was on the side closest to Brigade HQ (the east side as I recall). The tent for LTs Eckert, Olds, Zinn and myself (I don't remember where LT Bennett was bunked) was the first tent up. It was next to the road (on the north side). Roy's tent was opposite our tent. The U2 mess tent was across the road. Great newsletter as usual.

Jim Robinson
B/2/503d

Roger that, Jim. The inscription shown was printed on the back of the Bde PIO photo and says it was B/2/503. I'll put your note in next month's *Incoming* and see if we can get more input. Thanks bro. Ed



~ 3/503 Luncheon Scheduled ~

Make a note on your calendars: The 3rd Batt in coordination with the National Reunion activities will be holding a Luncheon on 7 Jun 2012 at 11:30 in the Blue Fire Grill in the Hyatt, our reunion hotel in Lexington, KY. The reservation has been made with Emily Dowd, Senior Convention Services Manager, for 30-50 possible attendees with arrangement made for us to order off the existing menu. The prices are really fair.

I will be bringing an Echo Co Guidon. Paul Fisher tells me he will have one for HHC. Don't know at this point whether Mike Switzer will be present with Charlie Co's Guidon and or if Eldon Meade will there with his Charlie Co. We just might have two for Co C.



Now - is there anyone out there in A, B or D with some Airborne Esprit De Corps who might be interested in obtaining and bringing your Guidon? If so, I purchased mine at Benning Awards. It is the real deal. I keep mine on my "I love Me Wall" at home except for when it is at the Reunions.

Mason Branstetter
Nov Plt, D/3/503 Apr-Jun 70
TOC Dty O, Jun-Oct 70
E Co, 3/503 Oct 70 - Apr 71
503.873.3545
mason@silvertonealty.com

*"If you don't write it down,
it never happened."*

That's according to Jim Bethea, HHC/2/503d, '65/'66. And Jim makes a good point. We hope you'll send in your stories and photos for inclusion in future issues of our newsletter. Let's capture some of our experiences for historical purposes and before we forget them. It doesn't have to be blood and guts stuff, but that's o.k. too. You can honor a buddy or tell an amusing story. Don't worry about spelling and grammar, we'll run it thru the washer to repair such things. ATW! Ed



THE WARRIOR'S CODE OF HONOR

By a combat veteran

As a combat veteran wounded in one of America's wars, I offer to speak for those who cannot. Were the mouths of my fallen front-line friends not stopped with dust, they would testify that life revolves around honor. In war, it is understood that you give your word of honor to do your duty -- that is -- stand and fight instead of running away and deserting your friends.

When you keep your word despite desperately desiring to flee the screaming hell all around, you earn honor. Earning honor under fire changes who you are.

The blast furnace of battle burns away impurities encrusting your soul.

The white-hot forge of combat hammers you into a hardened, purified warrior willing to die rather than break your word to friends -- your honor.

Combat is scary but exciting.

You never feel so alive as when being shot at without result.

You never feel so triumphant as when shooting back -- *with* result.

You never feel love so pure as that burned into your heart by friends willing to die to keep their word to you.

And they do.

The biggest sadness of your life is to see friends falling.

The biggest surprise of your life is to survive the war. Although still alive on the outside, you are dead inside - shot thru the heart with nonsensical guilt for living while friends died.

The biggest lie of your life torments you that you could have done something more, different, to save them. Their faces are the tombstones in your weeping eyes, their souls shine the true camaraderie you search for the rest of your life but never find.

You live a different world now. You always will. Your world is about waking up night after night silently screaming, back in battle.

Your world is about your best friend bleeding to death in your arms, howling in pain for you to kill him.

Your world is about shooting so many enemies the gun turns red and jams, letting the enemy grab you.

Your world is about struggling hand-to-hand for one more breath of life.

You never speak of your world.

Those who have seen combat do not talk about it. Those who talk about it have not seen combat.

You come home but a grim ghost of he who so lightheartedly went off to war. But home no longer exists. That world shattered like a mirror the first time you were shot at.

The splintering glass of everything you knew fell at your feet, revealing what was standing behind it - grinning death -- *and you are face to face, nose to nose with it!*

The shock was so great that the boy you were died of fright. He was replaced by a stranger who slipped into your body, a MAN from the Warrior's World.

In that savage place, you give your word of honor to dance with death instead of run away from it. This suicidal waltz is known as: "doing your duty." You did your duty, survived the dance, and returned home. But not all of you came back to the civilian world.

Your heart and mind are still in the Warrior's World, far beyond the Sun.

They will *always* be in the Warrior's World. They will never leave, they are buried there.

In that hallowed home of honor, life is about keeping your word.

People in the civilian world, however, have no idea that life is about keeping your word. They think life is about ballgames, backyards, barbecues, babies and business.

The distance between the two worlds is as far as Mars from earth.

This is why, when you come home, you feel like an outsider, a visitor from another planet. You are.

Friends try to bridge the gaping gap. It is useless. They may as well look up at the sky and try to talk to a Martian as talk to you. Words fall like bricks between you.

Serving with Warriors who died proving their word has made prewar friends seem too un-tested to be trusted - thus they are now mere acquaintances.

The hard truth is that earning honor under fire makes you a stranger in your own home town, an alien visitor from a different world, alone in a crowd.

The only time you are not alone is when with another combat veteran. Only *he* understands that keeping your word, your honor, whilst standing face to face with death gives meaning and purpose to life.

Only *he* understands that your terrifying - but *thrilling* - dance with death has made your old world of backyards, barbecues and ballgames seem deadly dull.

Only *he* understands that your way of being, due to combat damaged emotions, is not the un-usual, but the usual, and you are OK.

A common consequence of combat is adrenaline addiction.

Many combat veterans -- including this writer -- feel that war was the high point of our lives, and emotionally, life has been downhill ever since.

This is because we came home adrenaline junkies. We got that way doing our duty in combat situations such as: crouching in a foxhole waiting for attacking enemy soldiers to get close enough for you to start shooting; hugging the ground, waiting for the signal to leap up and attack the enemy; sneaking along on a combat patrol out in no man's land, seeking a gunfight; suddenly realizing that you are walking in the middle of a mine field.

(continued....)



Circumstances like these skyrocket your feeling of aliveness far, far above and beyond anything you experienced in civilian life: never have you felt so terrified - yet so *thrilled*; never have you seen sky so blue, grass so green, breathed air so sweet, etc.; because dancing with death makes you feel stratospheric - nay -- intergalactic *aliveness*.

Then you come home, where the addictive, euphoric rush of aliveness/adrenaline hardly ever happens -- naturally, that is.

Then what often occurs? "*Quick, pass me the motorcycle*" (and/or fast car, drag race, speedboat, airplane, parachute, big game hunt, extreme sport, fist fight, gun fight, etc.).

Another reason Warriors may find the rush of adrenaline attractive is because it lets them feel *something* rather than *nothing*. The dirty little secret no one talks about is that many combat veterans come home unable to feel their feelings. It works like this.

In battle, it is understood that you give your word of honor to not let your fear stop you from doing your duty. To keep your word, you must numb up/shut down your fear.

But the numb-up/shut-down mechanism does not work like a tight, narrow rifle shot; it works like a broad, spreading shotgun blast. Thus when you numb up your fear, you numb up virtually all your other feelings as well.

The more combat, the more fear you must "not feel." You may become so numbed up/shut down inside that you cannot feel much of anything. You become what is known as "battle-hardened," meaning that you can feel hard feelings like hate and anger, but not soft, tender feelings (which is bad news for loved ones).

The reason that the rush of adrenaline, alcohol, drugs, dangerous life style, etc. is so attractive is because you get to feel *something*, which is a step up from the awful deadness of feeling *nothing*.

Although you walk thru life alone, you are not lonely. You have a constant companion from combat -- Death. It stands close behind, a little to the left.

Death whispers in your ear: "*Nothing matters outside my touch, and I have not touched you...YET!*"

Death never leaves you -- it is your best friend, your most trusted advisor, your wisest teacher.

Death teaches you that every day above ground is a fine day.

Death teaches you to feel fortunate on good days, and bad days...well, they do not exist.

Death teaches you that merely seeing one more sunrise is enough to fill your cup of life to the brim -- pressed down and running over!

Death teaches you that you can postpone its touch by earning serenity.

Serenity is earned by a lot of prayer and acceptance.

Acceptance is taking one step out of denial and accepting/allowing your repressed, painful combat memories to be re-lived/suffered thru/shared with other combat vets -- and thus de-fused.

Each time you accomplish this act of courage/

desperation, the pain gets less; more tormenting combat demons hiding in the darkness of your gut are thrown out into the healing sunlight of awareness, thereby disappearing them; the less bedeviling combat demons, the more serenity earned.

Serenity is, regretfully, rather an indistinct quality, but it manifests as an immense feeling of fulfillment/satisfaction: from having proven your honor under fire; from having demonstrated to be a fact that you did your duty no matter what; and from being grateful to Higher Power/your Creator for sparing you.

It is an iron law of nature that such serenity lengthens life span to the max.

Down thru the dusty centuries it has always been thus. It always will be, for what is seared into a man's soul who stands face to face with death never changes.

WRITER'S NOTE

This work attempts to describe the world as seen thru the eyes of a combat veteran. It is a world virtually unknown to the public because few veterans can talk about it.

This is unfortunate since people who are trying to understand, and make meaningful contact with combat veterans, are kept in the dark.

How do you establish a rapport with a combat veteran? It is very simple. Demonstrate to him out in the open in front of God and everybody that you too have a Code of Honor -- that is, you also keep your word -- *no matter what!*

Do it and you will forge a bond between you.

Do it not and you will not.

End of story. Case closed.

I offer these poor, inadequate words - bought not taught - in the hope that they may shed some small light on why combat veterans are like they are, and how they can fix it.

It is my life desire that this tortured work, despite its many defects, may yet still provide some tiny sliver of understanding which may blossom into tolerance - nay, acceptance - of a Warrior's perhaps unconventional way of being due to combat-damaged emotions from doing his duty under fire.

Signed,

A Purple Heart Medal recipient who wishes to remain anonymous.

***Dedicated to absent friends in
unmarked graves.***

[Sent in by Richard "Airborne" Martinez, B/2/503d]



~ Sky Soldier Extraordinaire ~



Sgt. Jim Bednarski C/2/503d, '68

Sgt. Jim Bednarski, known to his buddies as "Ski"... the machine gunner featured as one of "The Hill People" in the book *Digger, Dogface, Brownjob, Grunt*.



Ski

According to the late Sgt. Nasty Asbury, a story related to me and Capt. Joe Jellison at the June 2010 dedication of the 173d Memorial at Fort Benning, Georgia:

"Ski should have been awarded the Medal of Honor. With his assistant gunner down, and me (Nasty) hauling and feeding ammo, Ski ran to a small, isolated outcrop and began laying rounds into an NVA platoon that was trying to separate Charlie Company platoons. For hours, under heavy incoming fire, Ski kept the NVA from advancing, firing his gun in short bursts to keep the barrel from melting down."

A large, quiet man, Ski carried his gun with a towel wrapped over the belt-feed housing. He carried the weapon for his entire tour. No one touched Ski's gun. Not even his many assistant gunners. A quiet man, Ski might grin if the occasion suited him. At twilight, every night, his gun-set was tailored for a massive assault. He picked up one VC riding to work on his bicycle and threw the man, his weapon, and his two-wheeler into the rice paddy. He walked tracers right down the dike. Just another encounter for a man that survived Hill 875, where he kept Charlie Company's flank secure for 30-plus hours.

Ski lives in New York with his family and has finally come to grips with his war, putting the mess behind him.

He will tell you he was just another Grunt. Most would believe him.

Gary Prisk
Captain
C/2/503d

Posted in the Cockpit



**This was known to also apply
to certain RTOs & all 2LTs**

~ A Few Facts About Vietnam ~

50,000 American servicemen served in Vietnam between 1960-1964.

9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the official Vietnam era (Aug. 5, 1964 – May 7, 1975. 3,403,100 (including 514,300 offshore) personnel served in the Southeast Asia theatre (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, flight crews based in Thailand, and sailors in adjacent South China Sea waters).

7,484 American women served in Vietnam; 6,250 were nurses. 8 nurses died, 1 KIA.

Vietnam Vets represented 9.7% of their generation.

Most successful businessman who was a Vietnam Vet, Frederick Smith, Federal Express, U.S. Marine Corps.

Nearly 100% of all Vietnam Vets were honorably discharged.

Source:

"Myth vs. Reality", by B.G. Burkett & Glenna Whitley



If it *Looks* like the Flag, and *Waves* like the Flag....

Thanks for the newsletter.

I wonder if you would do something for me if you think it's worth your time and not inappropriate. There is no question that our government is selling us to China. There is nothing I can do about the cheap T-Shirts etc. that are sold. Our manufacturing base has all moved to China or Mexico. There is one item that I believe should only be made in America, **The American Flag**. I have been making some progress in having local stores sell *only* US made flags.



**From Home Depot web.
Sure looks like our flag.**

Yesterday, when I was shopping at Home Depot in their garden department, I discovered several different sized American Flag's **MADE IN CHINA**. Last June I spoke with the store management about this very thing and he removed all China-made American Flags.

Again I asked to speak with the manager. He was very cordial and told me that a few men (Vets) have stated the same opinion. He told me that senior management was of the opinion that any flags made for outdoor display were considered REPLICAS and not really a flag. All the *official* flags were sold inside the store. I held up one of these *replicas* and asked the manager to answer a couple of questions. First, what was in the upper left corner? He replied a blue rectangle with 50 white stars; you know where this is going. I asked a customer what she thought it was and she said, "*American Flag*."



My request to you, because you have hundreds of Sky Soldier's emails, is to ask everyone to ensure any US Flag they see for sale in *any* store, Home Depot for sure, **be made in the United States**. Thanks,

SSG Bryan Bowley
B/2/503d, '63-'65

173d.....Fall in!

Bryan, let's take it a step further. Here's the email address we found on the web for Mr. Frank Blake, CEO of Home Depot. Maybe a couple thousand *friendly and cordial* Sky Soldier notes might persuade the company to sell *only* American-made American flags? Thanks for the work you're doing on this brother. Ed

frank_blake@homedepot.com

Email message sent to Home Depot CEO:

Mr. Blake, hello:

My wife and I have been faithful customers of Home Depot for many years. We often kid we should buy stock in your company given the sums we spend annually to purchase products at your stores.

It has come to my attention Home Depot sells American flags which are **Made in China**. As an honorably discharged, combat-decorated Vietnam veteran who fought for what our flag represents, and having buddies who died fighting for what our flag represents, this note is to ask your company to consider replacing all foreign-made American flags with **American-made** flags once existing stocks have been exhausted or when your current purchasing contract has expired.

The two American-made flags on display at our home are purchased on-line, and not at Home Depot. You see, as veterans our flag has particular import to us, and in the view of many if not all, it should not be imported.

I produce the *2/503d Vietnam Newsletter* for thousands of active duty and retired paratroopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade and other veterans of war. We look forward to sharing your reply to this request in our upcoming May issue.

Thanks for giving this your most serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Donald L. Smith, Jr.
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep). 1965-1966



~ Made in America ~

See Home Depot reply on following page....



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From: KAREN_SISK@homedepot.com
Sent: Thursday, April 12, 2012
To: rto173d@cfl.rr.com
Subject: Home Depot Executive Escalations



Good Morning Mr. Smith,

The Home Depot is dedicated to supporting and honoring our men and women in uniform through our business practices, recruitment efforts, and corporate contributions. We recognize your contributions during such a tumultuous time, and we applaud your bravery. We are proud to sell products from U.S. companies and companies that manufacture products here.

While a small percentage of the products we import are from China, it is relevant to note that we operate 12 retail stores in six cities in China and employ approximately 3,000 associates there. We also have stores in Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam. We operate in a global economy, and work to provide the products our customers want while creating returns for our shareholders.

As an American-built company, holders of our stock include our more than 300,000 associates, most of who live and work in the U.S.A.

Mr. Smith, The Home Depot thanks you for your comments, and we value your opinion. Your feedback is appreciated by The Home Depot; and requests are taken into consideration whenever our product selections are made. If you would like to speak with me directly, you may contact me at the phone number or email listed.

Thank you,

Karen Sisk
Executive Escalations Team
The Home Depot
Customers First!
Karen_Sisk@homedepot.com

Hello Karen, thanks for your note which will be shared with our vets in our May newsletter. And thanks to Home Depot for considering the request to only sell U.S.-made American flags in your stores. Perhaps you can sell Chinese-made American flags at the 12 stores in China, and American-made American flags in our country? Best regards,

Lew
173d Airborne

Military Commitment by the Numbers

The Home Depot has developed partnerships and made numerous investments in support of our nation's military community. Our commitment to the military includes the following.

- We have hired more than 60,000 veterans since 2004.
- We have been honored by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Association with its 2003 Homefront Award for our commitment to more than 1,800 associates called to active duty in association with Operation Iraqi Freedom through extended and enhanced leave of absence benefits.
- We received the ESGR's highest award, The Freedom Award, in 2004.
- We launched Project Homefront, a national program to help military families with home repair while a family member served in the war with Iraq, in 2003.
- We have invested \$1 million and 1 million hours of volunteer service in support of the families of those serving our country on active duty.
- We contributed \$1 million worth of construction materials, tools and supplies to assist with the rebuilding efforts in Iraq in 2004.
- We have Welcome Home celebrations for our associates returning from active duty.
- We are one of only seven employers to be ranked in *G.I. Jobs* magazine's list of "Top 25 Military-Friendly Employers" for seven consecutive years, including #1 in 2004.
- We were named one of the "Top 10 Military-Friendly Employers" in 2007, 2008 and 2009, by *Military Spouse* magazine.
- We are a corporate member of the Army Spouse Employment Partnership.

Note: We pulled this excerpt off Home Depot's web site. Ed



The 82nd Airborne during World War II



Early 82nd Infantry Division patches

America's Guard of Honor

The double "A" on the shoulder patch refers to the nickname "*All American Division*" adopted by the organization in France during World War I.

On 25 March 1942, the 82nd Infantry Division was reactivated at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana under the command of Major General Omar N. Bradley. On August 15, 1942, the Division took wings as The 82nd Airborne – becoming the U.S. Army's first airborne division – now commanded by Major General Matthew B. Ridgway.



General Omar Bradley

At the same time, 82nd personnel also were used in the formation of a second airborne unit – the "*Screaming Eagles*" of the 101st Airborne Division.

In October, the 82nd was dispatched to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to pursue its new airborne training. On October 14, the 82nd absorbed the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, which had formed on May 1 at Fort Benning, Georgia. By the time that they went overseas, the 82nd would consist of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment and the 504th and 505th Parachute Infantry Regiments.

At Fort Bragg, the All Americans trained vigorously. These pioneering paratroopers stood up, hooked up and leaped from C-47 transport planes while the gliderborne troops were at work in the 15-man WACO-CG4A gliders – towed by the transport planes.

In the spring of 1943, the 82nd All Americans became the first airborne division sent overseas. They left via troop ships from New England and landed in Casablanca, North Africa on May 10, 1943. From there, they moved by rail to Oujda and then by truck to Kairouan, Tunisia. That would be their departure point for the Division's first combat drop – the invasion of Sicily.

Sicily - Operation Husky

Colonel James Gavin's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) and the 3rd Battalion of the 504th PIR parachuted to take the high ground near Ponte Olivo airfield northeast of Gela, Sicily on July 9, 1943.

Despite the wide scattering of the assault, the objectives were seized and the units linked up with the 1st Infantry Division the next day.

On July 11, 1943, the remaining Battalions of the 504th PIR were dropped in the vicinity of Gela with heavy losses from both the German and Allied (*friendly fire*) antiaircraft fire. Despite the heavy losses the division was moved up to the front by motor and reinforced by the 39th Infantry Regiment of the 9th Infantry Division on July 12, 1943. The crossings of Fiume delle Canno were secured on July 18, 1943 and the division pushed along the coastal highway, seizing the Marsala-Trapani area of Sicily's western coast by July 23rd.

Salerno - The Oil Drum Drop

The Division's second combat operation was a night parachute drop onto the Salerno beachhead on September 13, 1943 in support of General Mark Clark's 5th Army which was in danger of being pushed back into the sea.

The 504th PIR was parachuted south of the Sele River near Salerno on September 13, 1943. In order to guide the C-47 pilots to the shrinking drop zone, oil drums filled with gasoline soaked sand were ignited every 50 yards when signaled. 1300 troopers landed that night infusing a new sense of confidence to the beleaguered soldiers of the 5th Army. The 505th PIR was dropped the following night near the same drop zone to reinforce the air assault. On September 15th the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment (GIR) was brought into the beachhead amphibiously to join the rest of the division.



504th PIR in Sicily 1943

(continued....)



Once the beachhead was secured, the 504th PIR and the 376th PFAB began an attack to recover Altavilla on September 16, 1943 and the division fought towards Naples which it reached on October 1, 1943 and moved in to the next day for security duty.

"Leg Infantry"

After Naples, the 504th PIR & the 376th PFAB were detached from the 82nd Airborne temporarily and fought as "leg infantry" through the hills of southern Italy as part of the 36th Infantry Division. On October 29th they captured Gallo. They then battled in the Winter Line commencing with attacks up Hill 687 on December 15th, 1943.

On 9 December 1943 Colonel Gavin was promoted to Brigadier General and assumed the duties of the Assistant Division Commander of the 82nd Airborne while Lt Col Herbert Batchellor assumed command of the 505th. During the early months of 1944, units of the Division were moved to England as the allies were preparing for the assault on Western Europe. The 505th PIR again changed commanders on 22 March 1944 when Lt Col William Ekman assumed command. He would lead the 505th through the remainder of the war.

Anzio - Operation Shingle

On January 22nd & 23rd 1944, the 504th PIR, landed on the beach at Anzio and participated in heavy combat along the Mussolini Canal. It was their fierce fighting during this defensive engagement that earned the 504th PIR the nickname "*Devils in Baggy Pants*." The nickname was taken from an entry made in a German officer's diary.



All Americans in Normandy

D-Day - Operation Neptune

While the 504th was detached, the remainder of the 82nd was pulled out of Italy in December 1943 and moved to the United Kingdom to prepare for the liberation of Europe. With two combat jumps under its belt, the 82nd Airborne Division was now ready for the most ambitious airborne operation of the war, Operation Neptune - the airborne invasion of Normandy. The operation was part of Operation OVERLORD, the amphibious assault on the northern coast of Nazi-occupied France.

In preparation for the operation, the division was reorganized. Two new parachute infantry regiments, the 507th and the 508th, joined the division. However, due to its depleted state following the fighting in Italy, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment did not take part in the invasion.

On June 5-6, 1944, the paratroopers of the 82nd's three parachute infantry regiments and reinforced glider infantry regiment boarded hundreds of transport planes and gliders and, began the largest airborne assault in history. They were among the first soldiers to fight in Normandy, France.

The division dropped behind Utah Beach, Normandy, France between Ste Mere-Eglise and Carentan on June 6th, 1944. They were reinforced by the 325th GIR the next day. The division remained under strong German pressure along the Merderit River. Eventually,



Charles DeGlopper

the 325th GIR crossed the river to secure a bridgehead at La Fiere on June 9th. It was during this action that Pfc Charles N. DeGlopper single-handedly defended his platoon's position and subsequently was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism.

The next day the 505th PIR captured Montebourg Station and on June 12th the 508th PIR crossed the Douve at Beuzeville-la-Bastille and reached Baup. They established a bridgehead at Pont l'Abbe on June 19th. The division then attacked down the west coast of the Cotentin Peninsula and captured Hill 131 on July 3rd. The following day the 82nd seized Hill 95 overlooking La Haye-du-Puits.

(continued....)

