

DIABLO



The Link for All Veterans, Active Duty, Spouses, Family and Friends of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association – October 2018

REUNION OCTOBER 31 – NOVEMBER 4

The 2018 Reunion will take place in Fort Walton Beach, FL and will be hosted by Charmaine and Barry Deere. We will be honoring the 50th Anniversary of the Golden Brigade's deployment to Vietnam and the 35th Anniversary of Operation Urgent Fury – Grenada and the 15th Anniversary of OIF Operation Northern Delay.

Tentative Schedule of Events

Wednesday, 31 October	Arrival and Registration Hospitality Suite – Afternoon Opening
Thursday, 01 November	Welcoming Breakfast & Events Briefing Air Force Armament Museum / Ranger Training Battalion Local Restaurant Lunch Wall South Pensacola
Friday, 02 November	Hurlburt Field – Air Force Special Operations Lunch at Hotel Veterans Forum Special Event at Hotel Annual Membership Meeting
Saturday, 03 November	Beach Day / Outlet Shopping Small Group Beach Ball Tour Banquet, Raffles & Socializing
Sunday, 04 November	Departure

Register Now!

For **Schedule of Events**, **Hotel** and **Registration** details go to http://www.508pir.org/reunion/reunion_01.htm.

The **Hotel Cutoff date** for the Association's group rate is **10 October 2018**, so now is the perfect time to book. Early booking helps us better plan the overall Reunion Weekend.

50/50 Cash Prize Raffle Tickets Now Available!

Take advantage of this great opportunity to support the Association while having a good chance of winning the half-pool that is estimated to be \$2000-\$2500. **Tickets are just \$5 each** and can be purchased through the Association website at http://www.508pir.org/reunion/reunion_07htm. If you cannot make the Reunion in person, you can still participate in the 50/50 Cash Prize Raffle, so go online now!

Call for General Raffle Items

Never too early to think of quality items to bring to Florida for the post-Banquet General Raffle—always a fun time. The Association Board is recommending items valued at around \$20 to generate lots of interest and participation. Anyone not attending who wants to contribute items in advance please contact Chris Harris to arrange shipping.

If any of our various generations of 508ers need display tables for items, please contact Chris Harris at harris.chris.j@att.net Tel. (310) 729-2745 or Ellen Peters at eeptx@sbcglobal.net Tel. (214) 632-1360.

If possible, kindly bring an item valued at a minimum of \$20.00 for the raffle. ➔

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1 FURY



1-508 PIR began the month of June participating in Operation Swift Response, during which Fury Paratroopers loaded aircraft at Fort Bragg and then jumped into a training exercise alongside European allies in Latvia and Lithuania. This exercise served to demonstrate the readiness, flexibility, and tactical expertise of 1-508 PIR and the Global Response Force.

With the end of 1 Fury's 18 months as the tip of the spear of the 82 Airborne Division's Global Response Force, preparation for a new mission set began. The Battalion initiated this transition period with a block of Maintenance Focused Training, aimed at maximizing individual Paratrooper readiness and empowering leaders across the formation to maintain optimal levels of mission readiness. Additionally, 1-508 PIR took over as the Division's Outload Support Battalion, which is responsible for driving the gears at Fort Bragg that enable the Global Response Force to rapidly deploy anywhere in the world upon notification. Finally, Fury Paratroopers are preparing to deploy to Fort Bliss, Texas during the month of October to participate in the 2018 Network Integration Exercise. We will be testing new, dynamic, modular, and deployable communication infrastructure in specially-designed training scenarios. 1-508 PIR remains on the cutting edge of communication and electronic warfare capabilities; Fury Paratroopers remain capable of dominating any enemy on today's complex battlefields.



In addition to the change in mission set, 1-508 PIR recently welcomed a new command team. LTC Zach Corke took over command for LTC Rob McChrystal on 04 June 2018 and CSM Jacob Provence took over for CSM Herbert Gill on 28 August 2018. The Battalion is thankful for the dedicated service of LTC McChrystal and CSM Gill. Thanks to their efforts, LTC Corke and CSM Provence have taken over one of the best teams and most lethal fighting forces in the world.

Major John Intile
BN Executive Officer, 1-508 PIR
3BCT, 82nd ABN DIV
FURY FROM THE SKY! →



Change of Leadership



Rock Merritt and CSM Jacob Provence

74th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden Journey

by Florent Plana, grandson of Rene Paris who spent two years in a German Labor Camp, liberated in April of 1945 by the allies



For the 74th anniversary of Operation Market Garden, the Best Defense Foundation brought to Europe six veterans of the Second World War. Donnie Edwards, president of the foundation, provided this unique opportunity to bring these men back to the places where they fought more than seven decades ago.

Of the six veterans who took part in this trip, I would like to highlight two of them that are part of the Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Association. John Coates and Ralph King both volunteered for the Airborne and were assigned to their respective units after the Normandy campaign. Many paratroopers were lost during the invasion of Normandy and replacements were desperately needed. It was men like John Coates and Ralph King that filled this void. John was assigned as combat medic to C Company of the 508th PIR and Ralph joined H Company of the 506th PIR. Operation Market Garden on September 17, 1944 would be their first combat jump. Thanks to the Best Defense Foundation, we were able to visit the Drop Zones where these men landed in Son and Beek. It was a moving experience to spend the day listening to them recount and remember what happened in the Netherlands 74 years ago. A ceremony with local children took place in Beek to honor the men of the 508th who landed and bravely fought there. It was a reminder to the local community and younger generation about the sacrifice that was paid for their freedom. John Coates and Ralph King later took part in a parade in Eindhoven aboard WW2 vehicles and were applauded by the people of Eindhoven. It reminded us again that the citizens of Netherland have not forgotten their liberators.

We later went to the area where the Battle of the Bulge took place to visit the places where the 508th PIR and 506th PIR had fought. Once again, we were very moved by the experience of returning to the ground where John and Ralph once stood to fight against tyranny. Visiting Bastogne and the forest of Foy where H Co of the 506th PIR dug in during the winter of 1944 was incredibly moving knowing that Ralph King was wounded there. A piece of shrapnel broke his clavicle and he was later evacuated back to Bastogne.

It is difficult to imagine what these men went through in that immense forest during this long and cold winter of 1944 but visiting the sites with the men who were there gave me a better perspective of what really happened. I think that one of John's most moving moments from the trip was revisiting the cities of Vielsalm and Holzheim, Belgium and Germany where his company saw heavy combat during the Battle of the Bulge. First Sergeant Leonard Alfred Funk Jr., member of the 508th PIR was awarded the Medal of Honor in Holzheim while John Coates was doing his job treating the men who needed assistance with their wounds. As a combat medic, John Coates has a very different job during the war than most of the men. Listening to his story while we were visiting the places he fought in 1944 was a tremendous privilege for a young French man such as myself. It is very difficult to put into words what happened during those incredible 10 days in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. It is an experience that the team of the Best Defense Foundation and the veterans who took part in the trip will never forget. I would like to personally thank Donnie Edwards for this great opportunity and all the veterans including John Coates and Ralph King for their time in the military to help liberate the citizens of Western Europe. †

508th MORE THAN ALL-AMERICAN

by Dick O'Donnell

Have you ever heard of the 82nd World Wide Division? No, but perhaps you should have.

Thus far, we have captured the names of more than 8,900 men who have served in the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment since its inception in 1942. Of these, approximately 8,700 were in the regiment for some period during WWII.

While research on these men is far from complete, an interesting picture has emerged causing us to, tongue-in-cheek, conjecture that the 82nd All-American could have been named the 82nd World-Wide.

Why? Look at this distribution of 103 non-domestic birth places:

Remarkably, Germany leads the pack with 17, while Canada and Czechoslovakia had 14 each and Mexico yielded 11. Italy provided 9 and Cuba 4. China, Holland, Ireland and Poland had 3 each. Austria, Norway, Scotland, Sweden each provided 2. And with 1 apiece: Bahamas, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Guatemala, Hungary, Latvia, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Syria.

... and we are still researching! ➔

Rock Merritt's 95th Birthday

On August 11, Rock Merritt's 95th Birthday was celebrated at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, NC. Rock spoke about his life growing up in Oklahoma and as a young teenager seeing his father's farm auctioned off during the depression. Rock's father became a tenant farmer and at age 17, Rock joined the Civilian Conservation Corps.

After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Rock wanted to join the Marines. Upon arrival at the recruitment office, he saw a poster of a soldier carrying a Thompson submachine gun descending to the ground under a parachute. The caption read, "Are you man enough to fill these boots?" At that moment, Rock decided to become a paratrooper and was sent to Camp Blanding, FL where the newly formed 508 PIR was activated.

Rock also spoke about as CSM of XVIII Airborne Corps traveling to Washington, D.C. for the annual reunion of the Association United States Army (AUSA) in 1974. He travelled with sixteen soldiers representing the major commands of the corps each of whom had received the Soldier of the Year Award. Upon learning that Rock was there, General Omar Bradley, requested a meeting with him. Rock told General Bradley that he was a squad leader when he jumped into Normandy on D-Day and General Bradley stated that squad leader was the most difficult job in the Army. General Bradley asked to meet with the soldiers that accompanied Rock and he met with each soldier individually.

After Rock spoke, Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Assn. President, Ellen Peters, announced the origination of the Rock Merritt Squad Leader of the Year Award. Every year, a trooper from each battalion will be selected to receive this award. The trooper's name will be engraved on a permanent plaque and each trooper will receive a \$250.00 gift card.

A reception was held at the museum. ➔



LTC Terry Hilderbrand, Rock Merritt and LTC Zachariah Corke

Silk Over Normandy

by Cpl. Lawrence Palmer



Here is a short true story of the U.S. Paratroopers in the invasion of Normandy France.

We moved to the airport one week before "D" day. There we were briefed every day until every paratrooper knew exactly what his job was. But we still didn't know when we would jump. We had a pretty good idea. But we weren't sure and we didn't know where we were jumping. We were given a map of the area about twenty hours before we took off and then we knew where we were going.

June 5th

On June 5th we had a formation just before chow and our Commanding Officer, **"Captain Rubby", told us, "I wanted to get you men together before we jump, for it might be some time before I see you again, I haven't got much to say, all I'm going to say is happy landing and good hunting and give them Hell." after the formation we all ate chow and it was really a good chow. Maybe they

figured it was our last meal, and it was, for a lot of them. After we ate, we went to a movie and I will never forget it. They were showing Bob Hope in "They Got Me Covered". We had to leave in the middle of the picture, right where he had all that cold cream on his face. We often thought of how he got all that stuff off his face. We left the show and had to black our face and put on all our equipment. Then we started marching out to our planes. All the boys were shaking hands with their buddies and giving them their address.

Take-Off Time

Our take-off time was 11:05. We laid under the big wings of the C-47 until 10:45 then we got the order to load planes, it took the Crew and Radio Operator to put us in the plane. For we had on so much equipment we couldn't walk up the steps. At 11:05 we took off. We were told the plane ride would be about three hours. As soon as the plane had left the ground everybody lit up a cig. After we had finished the smoke most of us went to sleep. It was a very bright night, you could see the fighters on our left and bombers were ahead of us. As we approached the Channel you could see our Navy waiting. The Channel was full of ships. We flew like mad, after we crossed the Channel. The red lights came on and we got the order to stand and hook up. By that time we were running into some pretty heavy flak, there was also all kinds of rifle and machine-gun fire coming at us. The green light came on and the jump-master shouted "Let's go". But just as he started there was a lot of machine-gun fire coming right in the door. So he held us up for a second until it kindly died down, and then out. As we were coming down, they were throwing everything they had at us. It looked like the 4th of July and I was praying to live just until day light. We jumped at 2:21 AM of June 6th. When I hit the ground, I landed between two machine-guns and it took me thirty minutes to get out of my chute. Every time I tried they would open up with both guns. I finally got out and met some buddies of mine. We had twelve all together and started off. We ran into a machine-gun that killed two of the men so we turn to flank it. A friend of mine, that I had worked with for better than a year, was number one man. We hit a road that we had to cross, there he was machine-gunned. We gave him first-aid and started out to capture a house so we could take care of our friend. We took the house and went back after our boy, but he was gone. We never heard of him until we got back to our base camp, and we heard that his grave was found on July 7th.

After day break we met some more of our men. Now all together we had thirty-three men. Seven tanks were coming down the road just before we were able to get together. Just as the first tank passed under the building across from the one I was in, the Sgt. dropped a ground grenade into the tank. Knocking it out and killing seven men that were in it. Then we all hit them with all we had. They turned around and took off. We then got together and started off to try and find the rest of our men. We went about a mile and were pinned down. There we set up an all around defense, and fought for five days. Then on "D" day six, the beach head troops came through and we were relieved and then we went and assembled on "hill 30", and started off again. We fought for twenty-seven more days before we were relieved and sent back to our base camp.

One can't tell all that we went through, but this is a part of a part of what we went through while in France. †

**Note: "Rubby was the nickname Larry Palmer gave to Capt. Gerard Ruddy

Letters From Nam

by Kelly Webb



This is my dad, Sgt. Dana C. Johnson, 82nd Airborne in 1968.

October 16, 1967 he raised his right hand thereby pledging his life to service for our country in the Army. He had married my mom and pledged his undying love just one month prior.

September 16, 1968 on my mom's birthday, he arrived in Vietnam. All I ask of all of us today while we grill out and enjoy a day off is: REMEMBER

Freedom isn't free. The ultimate sacrifice has been paid... for you.

HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED AND REMEMBER.

Here is an excerpt from his letters he wrote to my mom around Memorial Day 1969. In these letters, it appears two men were kidnapped in action... they gave the ultimate sacrifice.

28 May 69 – Firebase Hardcore

We had memorial services today and yesterday for the 2 guys KIA'ed in the Hobo woods. We also had an awards ceremony to pass out Medals, I received the Bronze Star it should be in the papers as I filled out a news release.

Tomorrow we move out into the AO again, don't know how long we'll be out.

They're showing movies here now every night and they have some football highlights prior to the movie. Saw highlights of Ohio State Vs Mich. in Rose bowl playoff enjoyed that.

The Battalion Sgt. Major called me aside the other day and said he needed to talk to me. I couldn't figure it out. Then he asked me if I'd like a direct field commission to 2nd Lt., I declined! Since I'd have at least another 2 years of service and I just couldn't see that. Probably would have at least another tour over here also.

Got a letter from Randy and Paulette they seem so proud of Angie and talked about her learning to walk etc. Amazing what can happen in 2 years. Just think I was the first of the 3 of us to get married and now both Jerry and Randy have kids, and I have none. That probably wouldn't be if the Army hadn't gotten me. But really it hasn't been that bad. Many areas are a lot worse than where I've been and I'm grateful for all the people I've met and had the opportunity to work with.

Most of the old guys are rotated home now and so I'm getting to be one of the older guys in country now. Those remaining will be gone in the middle of June. Then I'll be the oldest guy in the Company.

Need to answer some other letters so better sign.

29 May 69 – West of Saigon

Back into the field in our old AO!

They never did find the two guys from Bravo Company up in the Hobo! They've been given up on. All they ever found was a bloody 82nd patch nailed to a tree and a 4-inch piece of scalp, both were found in the area they were lost in. They're having both analyzed to see if the blood or scalp either one match one of the guys. After searching for 2 to 3 days they finally gave up.



It's getting ready to rain so better sign and get my stuff together.

Me and my dad 1972

GRATEFUL today that my dad came home safe.

HONORED that I live in a country where many find it their calling to serve our country.

PRAYING for those who are currently serving.

REMEMBERING those who have fallen. May we never forget. †

CHANGE OF COMMAND

by Ellen Peters

On August 2, 2018, the Change Command took place on Pike Field at Ft. Bragg, NC. The Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division was passed from MG Erik Kurilla to MG James Mingus. When the time came for the review of the troops, MG Kurilla asked Rock Merritt to join him. This has never been done before at a Change of Command ceremony and was quite an honor for Rock. The General escorted Rock to a waiting vehicle and off they went. When they returned to the reviewing stand area, Rock unbuckled his seat belt before the vehicle came to a complete stop. MG Kurilla quipped about Rock making a PLF (Parachute Landing Fall)! When the general asked Rock what he thought about the troops, Rock replied "Every American should see a troop review at least once in their lifetime." I agree with Rock. The whole ceremony was quite a spectacle. After MG Kurilla and Rock reviewed the troops, the entire division marched past the reviewing stands. Then came the parade of vehicles with mounted and towed weapons and all different types of helicopters flew past. Every moment was something to see and I will not soon forget the experience. ➔



Rock saluting the troops



Rock and MG Kurilla





1-508 in Review



2-508 in Review

FINAL JUMPS

Correction to the Final Jump for Ray Henry from our last issue. The correct address to send condolences is Shirley Henry at 2774 Carolina Country Club Rd.; Spartanburg, SC 29306-6322.

Havnen, Jim

On September 30, Kevin Morrissey posted the following on the Vietnam 82nd Airborne Facebook page, "Lost a brother and best friend from Nam this morning, Jim Havnen, B Co. 1/508. AO (Agent Orange)."



Bear Creek - James R. Havnen, age 71, passed away on Sunday, September 30, 2018, at the VA Hospital in Milwaukee. He was born in Milwaukee on February 23, 1947, son of the late Oren and Helen (Hanson) Havnen. James served his country in the US Army 82nd Airborne Division, serving in Vietnam from 1968-1969. On September 18, 1986, he was united in marriage to Barb Fletcher in Shawano. Jim and his wife own and operate Willies Bar in Bear Creek where he enjoyed socializing with his patrons. He enjoyed horseshoes, pool, darts, watching sports, especially college football. He was a member of the VFW Post #664, Clintonville.

Jim is survived by his wife Barb; siblings, Janice Randa, Greenfield; Kathy (Tony) Suschil, Hudson, OH; Ruth (David) Shapiro, Georgetown, DE sister-in-law, Betty Havnen; brother and sister in-laws: Bob Fletcher; Dick (Barb) Fletcher; Sue (Tom) Bechard; Dan (Mary) Fletcher; Sherri (Hugh) Flanagan; Don (Pam) Fletcher; Jerry (Wendy) Fletcher; Cathie (Chris) Hansen; Chris (Lisa) Fletcher; Carla (Todd) Gernetzke. He is further survived by nephews, nieces, other relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, a brother Ray, brother in-law, John Randa, father and mother in-law, Willard and Janice Fletcher and a brother in-law, Steve Fletcher.

Condolences can be sent to Jim's widow, Barb at: **N8053 Hickory Rd.
Bear Creek, WI 54922-9717 †**



HOOK, Kenneth H. "Kenny" Of Dayton, Ohio, Montgomery, County, born on May 20, 1922 in Germantown, Ohio, to the late Effie Fourman and the late Chester Hook, passed away at age 96 on May 31, 2018 in Cleveland, Ohio. He lived at Independence Village of Aurora, Ohio, for the last five years. From 1942 to 1945, Kenneth served in the [Army](#) in World War II; he was a POW and was awarded the [Purple Heart](#). After the war, Ken was employed as a systems analyst at [General Motors](#); he retired in 1980. Kenneth was the beloved husband of the late Marjorie Ione, the love of his life. He was preceded in death by his mother and father, his stepmother, Ethel Hook, stepfather, Glenn Fourman, and brothers, Russell Hook and Norman Hook. Kenneth is survived by his son, Charles (Janice) Hook of Lee's Summit, MO, daughter, Cheryl (Heinz) Akers of Solon, OH, grandchildren, David (Paige) Akers of Alexandria, VA, Carrie Akers of Palm Beach Gardens, FL, and Stacey, Jolene, & Michael

Francy, great-grandchildren, Rylie, Isaiah, Nick, Tanner, Dalton, Brayden, & Bradlee; and great-great-grandchild, Maylee, all in MO. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, bowling, antiques, knives, Texas Holdem, Bingo, & floral design. He was a trustee at Ohmer Park United Methodist Church, in Dayton, and was a member of American Ex-Prisoners of War. Special thanks to the staff and residents of Independence Village in Aurora, Ohio, for their friendship and care during the past 5 years. Condolences can be sent to the family at: **3001 Kenmore Ave.**

Dayton, OH 45420-2235 †



Janish, Kenneth January 12, 2018, age 94; beloved husband of the late Evelyn M. (nee Lehner) Janish; dearest father of Evelyn L. (late Dale Madison) Janish and Mary K. (Carl) Towles; loving grandfather of Stacey (Jason) Refermat; great grandfather of Hayley and Jaxson Refermat; also survived by brothers Donald Janish and sisters Dolores Wilk and Shirley Janish; predeceased by brother Robert Janish. Ken served in the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne during World War II. After the war, he, father Frank and brother Robert formed the Clarence Dairy. Ken was a former Co-Chairman of the Niagara Frontier 82nd Airborne and a former Officer in the Disabled American Veterans.

Condolences can be sent to the family at: **256 Wayside Dr.
Depew, NY 14043-1722** †

Kindly submit information of final jumps to Editor@508PIR.org. Please include: name, company, years served in the 508th if available, and address where to send condolences if available.



NEW MEMBERSHIPS

Lifetime Memberships:

Sustaining Members:

Bill Knapp - WWII Veteran of B and F Co.
Garrett O'Leary - SCT HHC 1-508, with the unit since August 2017
Carl Porter - WWII Veteran of Service Co. upgraded to Sustaining level

Supporters:

CPT Jason Decker - Served with 1st Battalion 508th from 2015-2017.
Jerry T. Grubbs - A Co. 508 ARCT 09/51 to 09/54. Transferred from 508th Airborne Chapter.
Edward Lamoureux - Son of the late Francis Lamoureux who served in G Co. during WWII.
David Liem - No info available
Susan and Jack Talley - Susan is the daughter of 1LT George Gurwell who served with HHC 508th from 1942-1945.

Annual Membership:

Vivian Nazario-Jones & Antonio Jones - Antonio served with B Co 1st Battalion 508th from 1991-1994.
Susana and Donald Thompson, whose grandson is currently serving in the 508th PIR. †

EVERY SOLDIER HAS A STORY

And we want yours!! Do you have a story to tell of your service in the 508th? Combat or otherwise? If so, please send it to the Diablo editor at Editor@508pir.org. Our goal is to one day have a story or article from each generation of 508th paratroopers in every issue of the Diablo newsletter. †

HELP WANTED

Web site assistance with the following skills:

- 1 - Transcription assistants. From existing records to Word or Excel (or Open Systems equivalent applications). Accuracy imperative. Will provide master formats for input in either application environment.
- 2 - HTML experience for creation of new pages to include in existing website to record various types of facts. Raw data and web page templates available.
- 3 - Access Database design. Experienced person to extend existing design should be a motivated self-starter. Will collaborate regarding design requirements; provide sample inputs and assistance in testing results.

Contact Dick O'Donnell at Jumpmaster@508pir.org or 321-759-6174 †

THE PX IS OPEN

Hats are \$26.95 and Shirts are \$35.00. Prices include \$5.00 Shipping and Handling. Shirts are available in Blue, Red, Black and Gray. To purchase a shirt, visit the website at www.508pir.org or contact Chris Harris at harris.chris.j@att.net or (310) 729-2745.



Royal Blue



Red



Black



Gray



The Diablo

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