

# DIABLO



Voice Of The Family And Friends Of The 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment Association- August 2006 - Vol. 1, Nr. 2

## 508<sup>TH</sup> Mini Reunion Set For Augusta, GA

*New Association To Conduct First Business Meeting*



### From The Jumpmaster

By Dick O'Donnell

Everyone should be pleased to learn the details for the coming reunion slated to be held in Augusta, GA between October 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

Troy Palmer, as well as his family members, have been scurrying about and say that everything is now in place.

See the column at the right for all the "who, what, where and when".

### Static Line Author Swap

Many of you might not yet be aware that Bill Nation has relinquished his post as the author of the 508<sup>th</sup> column within the *Static Line* newspaper. Bill will be focusing on a book-writing project.

Beginning with the August 2006 edition, 508er Zig Boroughs will pick up the baton. Zig being the author of three books about the 508<sup>th</sup> should do a stellar job and we look forward to reading his contributions.

### 508<sup>th</sup> Web Site

Our regular visitors to [www.508PIR.org](http://www.508PIR.org) will be well aware of the continuing flow of information regarding the unit, its personnel and their exploits.

In our last newsletter we requested copies of pertinent order sets and that paid off in an unexpected fashion. While we had detailed 508<sup>th</sup> General Orders sets we needed, a copy of the First Parachute Brigade's GO-18 was submitted to us. Dated October 16, 1942, it named all officers and enlisted men assigned to the 508<sup>th</sup> Cadre as the unit formed in Camp Blanding.

Great Stuff! Send more! Photos and documents are all welcome! ➔

### 17<sup>th</sup> Hq 1st 2006 Reunion Augusta, GA.

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Troy and Donna Palmer (Larry and Laura Palmer's son and daughter-in-law) are sponsoring the Hq 1<sup>st</sup> Reunion in Augusta, Georgia.

This is the third Palmer sponsored reunion and you can expect a Grand time in our beautiful city. We guarantee an exciting and enjoyable Reunion with ample opportunity to see Augusta's sights, and visit with friends!

As mentioned in the initial letter, **all 508<sup>th</sup> PIR WWII Veterans and their family and friends** are invited to participate in this Reunion! Please help us pass the word about this opportunity to honor our hero's and enjoy each other's company.

All are welcome.

Accommodation information is as follows:

### Hotel /Room Rate

A special room rate has been negotiated for 508<sup>th</sup> PIR members and guests at \$72.00 per night (plus tax). You must make your own reservations. Please call:

Ramada Inn & Convention Center  
640 Broad St., Augusta,  
GA 30901, USA  
706-722-5541

- ♣ Please reference: 508<sup>th</sup> PIR when making your reservations.
- ♣ Check in should be October 17, 2006.
- ♣ Check out should be October 20, 2006.

### Registration Fee & Information:

- ♣ Registration Fee: \$75.00 per individual.
- ♣ Please make checks payable to: Troy Palmer
- ♣ And mail to: 1206 River Lane, Evans, Georgia 30809

### Registration Fee covers:

- ♣ A wonderful "Welcome Breakfast" Wednesday, October 18, 2006
- ♣ A magnificent Banquet Thursday, October 19, 2006
- ♣ A "Farewell Breakfast" Friday, October 20, 2006 and, of course, Command Post (CP) refreshments.

The CP will open at approximately 7:00 PM Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup> and remain open for business throughout the Reunion for all to enjoy!

Please submit your Registration Information and fees no later than October 1, 2006.

If you have any question please give me a call at 706-855-1453

My family and I are looking forward to seeing everyone in Augusta in October and we are excited about honoring all of you!

Sincerely,  
Troy Palmer

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## Preliminary Agenda

### Tuesday Oct 17

Arrive and check-in after 2 PM.  
CP opens

### Wednesday Oct 18

Welcoming Breakfast  
Family and Friends Association business meeting

### Thursday, Oct 19

Free Time for golf and local attractions

### Friday, Oct 20

Dinner Banquet  
Farewell Breakfast  
Checkout before 12 PM (noon)  
Goodbyes and departure

## TRAVEL NOTES:

Attendees can fly into the Augusta airport. The hotel does NOT have an airport shuttle. Instead, Troy Palmer will have a van for the 508th's exclusive use. Please advise Troy of your airline, flight number and scheduled arrival time either by e-mail at:

[palmertroy@aol.com](mailto:palmertroy@aol.com)

or by telephone (706-294-7125).

Upon arrival, call Troy at the same number to let him know you that you have your bags and are ready to be picked up.

## HOTEL OVERVIEW

- ♣ True Southern Hospitality In the Heart of Historic Downtown Augusta
- ♣ 14 Story upscale Hotel
- ♣ 200 Spacious guest rooms
- ♣ Meeting and Banquet rooms
- ♣ Eagles Nest Rooftop Lounge
- ♣ BJs Full Service Restaurant
- ♣ Indoor Heated Jacuzzi Pool
- ♣ 2 blocks from Civic Center
- ♣ 1 block from Riverwalk & Richmond County Museum
- ♣ No Pets Allowed
- ♣ Free Parking on Site

## GUEST ROOMS & AMENITIES

Complimentary High Speed Wireless Internet Access

- ♣ In-Room Coffee makers and Hairdryers
- ♣ In-Room Irons and Ironing Boards
- ♣ Cable television with remote control and in-room movies
- ♣ Electronic key entry
- ♣

## DRIVING DIRECTIONS

### From The South

I-95 North to Savannah; in Savannah take I-16 West to Statesboro; Take Highway

80 West out of Statesboro to Highway 25 North; Go through Millen and Waynesboro then continue on Highway 25 to Augusta; Turn left on Walton Way; Go to 7th Street and turn right; then right on to Broad Street; Hotel is located on right in the middle of 600 block of Broad Street.

### From The West

I-20 from Atlanta, take exit 200 off I-20 (Riverwatch Pkwy), the parkway is an expressway to downtown. Parkway ends at 15th Street, turn right on 15th and take an immediate left onto Broad Street, hotel is on the 600 block on the right.

### From The North

I-20 to exit 200 (Riverwatch Pkwy) in Augusta, this parkway is an expressway to downtown. Parkway ends at 15th Street, turn right, take an immediate left onto Broad Street, hotel is on 600 block on the right.

### Fly and Drive

From Airport take right on Doug Barnard Parkway then right on Gordon Hwy, turn left off of Gordon Hwy on the Walton Way, and turn right on to 7th Street. At Broad Street turn right, hotel is in the middle of the 600 block, on the right. ➔

## Condolences

### Dwayne T. Burns

Dwayne Burns, F Co, passed away from this life and to the next while in the ICU floor of Baylor Grapevine Hospital Tuesday morning, 08/08/06 at 4:10.

Dwayne was born Oct. 21, 1924, in Fort Worth. He lived most of his life in the Lake Worth and Haltom City area. Dwayne married Mildred True on Aug. 15, 1948. When not working at Bell Helicopter or on home designs, Dwayne enjoyed flying, creating stained glass windows and music. He wrote a book about his war experiences due in September.

While Dwayne did not live to see his book "Jump Into The Valley of The Shadow" published, his son and co-author Leland was able to show him a color photocopy of the jacket. "Its a dynamic cover, almost like a movie poster, and dad was well pleased although he could not talk due to a ventilator tube helping him breath."

Visit [www.jumpintothevalley.com](http://www.jumpintothevalley.com) for further details and to order a book.

### John M. Gieb, Sr.

John Gieb, Service Co, died March 3, 2006 in North Olmsted, Ohio.

John was a member of the 508th's cadre. He was amongst more than 300 officers and men transferred from the 1st Parachute Brigade of Fort Benning.

### John H. Shipley

John Hanna Shipley, 81, died on June 10, 2006. He was born May 6, 1925 to Thomas and Elizabeth Shipley in Philadelphia, PA. His wife of 51 years, Ruth Shipley (nee Guggler), predeceased him in 1998.

John served his country in World War II as a paratrooper in the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions in Europe.

Graveside services and interment was at Arlington Cemetery in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania.

### Eva Lee Williamson

Wife of Francis Williamson (D Co.) passed away early in the morning of August 5, 2006. She and Francis were married 64 years.

Ellen Peters, friend of the 508th, met the family members on the Static Line trip to Europe for the 60th observation of D-Day in 2004 and, since they live in the same area, stayed in touch after their return to Texas.

"Many times have I joined the 'Williamson Girls' for lunch," recalled Ellen, "and I have had the family to my house for dinner over the Christmas holidays. They are a lovely family and Eva Lee was a wonderful wife, mother, and friend. I really enjoyed getting to know her. She was very interesting."

She continued, "A lot of you know Francis was taken prisoner in Normandy. Eva Lee didn't know if he was dead or alive for eight months and she had a little baby at home that Francis had never seen. In the foyer of their home in Richardson, TX is a faded photograph of Francis that she kept in her window during the time that Francis was MIA."

If anyone would like to write the Williamson family a note, their address is: 631 Twilight Trail, Richardson, TX 75080. ➔

## Searching For ...

We must apologize to those individuals who sent in queries regarding their relatives from the 508<sup>th</sup>. Due to a computer glitch their requests were lost and we hope that they will send them once again. †

## Recollections

Despite the loss mentioned above, a significant contribution came from Della Pedersen, the widow of Earl Cornwall. Della has been researching Earl's service for his grandchildren and has talked with a number of Earl's Service Company comrades. As such, she has amassed a collection of research notes and commentary, as presented below.

**Charles Thompson:** At the time of the Normandy Drop, a superior Warrant Officer, bumped him (Thompson) from participating in the jump so he remained in England until the 508th returned 33 days later.

Four out of twenty riggers were lost in the Normandy jump, most of them in the hedgerows. The 508th were scattered far and wide. They lost about 20 men who had been dropped at elevations varying from 1500 ft to 300 feet. The Riggers had arrived in two planes. He believes Earl was on the one that knew they had passed over their drop zone, so made a circle before dropping. Because the Riggers were in a work area during training, they missed much of the training related to night drops. Emphasis was made on moving out (away from) the hedgerows but should have been towards the hedgerows for protection. In the open areas, they were very vulnerable to the enemy. The intention of rapid departure from the planes did not serve them as well as intended on the ground as soldiers were linking up with strangers in different companies, not knowing whom they were with or where they were supposed to be.

From one planeload, two of the Riggers [Elmer Martell and Liddell Keating] were captured as POW's. They were in the same camp for a while but dared not let the Germans know that they knew each other. Keating served as a POW camp organizer while Martell was moved from camp to camp, eventually

ending up in a camp in Poland from which he had to hike back across Germany to the American lines after the war was over.

After the Normandy drop, the paratroopers were returned to England where they relaxed, regrouped and were reinforced with new recruits.

On September 17, 1944 the 508th made a jump into Holland from England.

The Service Company stayed in England and was celebrating in Reading on Christmas Eve when Thompson received a message for 60 men to collect in southern England and pack chutes. (One source reported packing chutes for five days. Another source reported working in three shifts around the clock for several weeks.) They then moved all their equipment to Sissone, France in support of the troopers in Holland. They delivered 437 railcars of equipment for the warriors. In Sissone, they set up a camp of their own.

As the days progressed, they trained to jump into POW camps believing that our POWs would be tortured as the military entered Germany. That plan was cancelled when Hitler committed suicide.

They were in Sissone when they were selected as the Guard of Honor and moved to Frankfurt, Germany sometime during midsummer 1945.

As members of Eisenhower's honor guard, they were on hand for any dignitaries - the President, Secretary of War, Congressmen, Military Officers, heads of other governments, whoever visited to plan for the occupation and reconstruction with the Marshall Plan, and to do post war analysis of good moves and bad moves made during the war.

The Riggers served in Eisenhower's Honor Guard 5 -6 months beyond the end of the war before most of them returned to the states. With persuasion from Commander General Gavin, the regiment was chosen to lead the Victory Parade down Fifth Avenue in New York City on January 12, 1946.

Thompson himself had enlisted in the military about three years before war was declared. Though he moved with the Honor Guard to Frankfurt, he was there for only a short time when he was offered his release August 1, 1945 because of having earned sufficient points.

## Personal Contacts and Comments:

**John Kersh:** "[Earl] would have been in the Parachute Packing Post. I was in charge of Parachute Maintenance. We did repair work and made drop containers for weapons."

"The happiest time was when, after being captured on June 6, I escaped on June 12."

"Most of the times, the Rigger section of the Service Co was not stationed with the rest of the Regiment. We would be on Detached Services. In England, we were at Camp OAKUM. It consisted of Rigger Section 508 and Riggers Section 505 with a Captain from the 505th. Lt. Thompson was in charge of 508."

"The first thing they had us do (in Frankfurt) was to make 2300 white nylon silk scarves which the troopers wore instead of ties. We also had to make a cap of every size - 7 7/8, 7 1/4, etc. and find out how many of each size we needed. I took out the threads, had someone press it, then we cut patterns,"

"The last jump for me out of Frankfurt was (a demonstration jump) for Sonja Henie, a wartime movie star who was a guest of Col. Lindquist. They shared a Swedish heritage."

**George May:** "(The regiment) served the SHAEF HQ as primarily a ceremonial guard unit. When Marlene Dietrich visited the 508th, they executed a demonstration jump but it became a disaster as 9 or 10 planes flew into the drops. This was done at the airbase in Fontanes. "

George believed many of the losses in the Normandy jump were due to the Air Force. The pilots were distracted by the flak in the night sky and did not follow the flight pattern. Consequently, many troopers were dropped as many as five miles off target.

**Martin Mortensen:** "Service and Headquarter Companies were not in a Battalion. They made up their own Company. The Honor Guard consisted of three companies in each group. One Battalion guarded Eisenhower, one his home, one his office, and one trained for the next time. I don't remember how often they rotated, but I think it was every month. "

Martin recalled a discouraging moment: "A Lt. posted me behind a large tree on the corner of a road. I was told to shoot any German who came down the hill. What if a convoy came and I was alone?" It was daylight when he posted me he said; 'I'll relieve you in a couple hours.' I stayed there all night in 6 inches of snow, until a convoy came and he said to me, 'Oh, my gosh! I forgot about you.' After standing in 6 inches of snow all night, I wasn't a bit happy."

**Heimer Swanson:** "I knew [Earl] at work as one of the Sergeants who inspected and closed the parachutes that we packed." "I really got to know him" when we went on an 8-day rest camp at Evian, France. We shared a room in the Hotel Royale on the shore of Lake Geneva. "We lived royally at Hotel Royale for sure!"

Heimer joined the Riggers in England when the 508th returned after the Normandy Jump.

"The 508 PIR with the Rigger section left Sissone, France for Frankfurt, Germany on or about June 8, 1945. Each company had varying duties pertaining to this assignment from guard duties to driving Jeeps, trucks, etc. for the Regiment, and packing parachutes and attending to the parachute repair tasks, Rigger work that Earl I and I were involved with.

The entire 508 PIR participated in a mass parachute jump - probably late July 1945. We jumped into a potato field just outside Frankfurt.

This was officially a qualification jump, as troopers were required to jump periodically to stay in so-called jump status; but this turned out to be sort of a demonstration with WACs and other Army personnel serving as on-lookers. As such, it did become sort of a PR project for the Regiment's public relations team."

I was in the Victory Parade on January 12, 1946. We marched 90 blocks down 5th

Avenue and 90 blocks back with the first half at rigid attention. Quite a day!

"On Christmas Day 1944 I was dressed in my dress uniform, just ready to walk to Oakham, England (about a mile away) to attend an English Christmas Church Service when we were suddenly restricted to the base.

I changed into work clothes and we rode in trucks to Redding and we packed equipment parachutes for several weeks. I don't know if Earl was on that job with us or not (Lt. Thompson remembered distinctly that he was.) We packed in 3 shifts working around the clock so it was apparently a rush job in support of the battle of the Bulge warriors). The troops in the Ardennes needed many of those chutes for supply delivery by air."

"[Earl] was a fine trooper, a top notch Rigger, and a good friend. He was one of the men that I related to and I have pleasant memories of him. Thank you for preserving this material for his children."

+



**The Diablo**

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