

# DIABLO



The Link for All Veterans, Spouses, Family and Friends of the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment Association — December, 2011 - Vol. 6, Nr. 3

## 2011 Reunion

On October 12th through the 16th, 2011, our beloved 505 and 508th Associations came together in Columbus, Georgia at Fort Benning for our first combined reunion. Hosted by Ellen Peters, approximately 100 members of both associations joined together as we remembered fallen heroes, reminisced of days gone by and looked forward to creating new and lasting friendships.

Attending this reunion was a wonderful experience! During the four day journey a great time was had by all and created a renewed excitement for many. The activities put together began with our Memorial Breakfast where our fallen heroes were remembered, to visiting Ft. Benning for a personalized tour and viewing of a paratrooper qualifying parachute jump to visiting FDR's Little White House in Warm Springs, this reunion was truly one for the record books!

Along with past traditions, wonderful new ones were begun. The brilliant and thoughtful direction given by Ellen Peters to "mix it up" prompted a new segment we named the "Veteran's Forum". During the Forum all of the Veterans spoke about their respective memories and the way their lives had been changed by their experiences ~ these heroes spoke with such eloquence and dignity that the hearts of all those in attendance were touched.

Time is fleeting but memories endure ~ join us in El Paso in 2012 and make your memories count!

Hope to see you there! God Bless.  
Donna Palmer

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## 508<sup>th</sup> Soldier Awarded Soldier's Medal for Heroism

The below article by Tom Berg appeared in the August 24, 2011 issue of the Orange County Register  
NEWPORT BEACH – Mail it, he said.. No, the Army said. We're coming out. So last weekend, the 82nd Airborne Division sent a colonel and his entourage from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to find Matt Blain. And give him something rare. "In my 27 years in uniform service, this is the first time I've seen this presentation," 4th Brigade Combat Team Col. Brian Mennes says. "That's how significant it

is." With that, the 82nd Airborne colonel explains his visit to a houseful of Blain's family and friends.

"It was almost like a movie," Mennes says, describing Blain's actions on Feb. 28, 2010, in the Guzara District of Afghanistan. A 30,000-pound Army vehicle flipped into a river swollen with rain. One man was thrown out the gun turret. Three were trapped inside as water filled the cabin. By the time Staff Sgt. Blain arrived, running full-tilt, other soldiers were scrambling down the embankment to try to help. Not Blain. He leapt off the river bank, toward the black torrent. Mid-air he began to wonder if that was such a good idea.

### PURPLE HEART

Jumping into danger runs in the Blain family. Blain's grandfather George Blain jumped into France the night before D-Day with the 101st Airborne "Pathfinders." He earned four Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart. "I wanted to be like him," says Blain, a fearless child who once skateboarded home two miles with a broken ankle. Like his grandfather, Blain eventually became a paratrooper. And like his grandfather, Blain earned a Purple Heart.

On Nov. 2, 2007, he stepped on a landmine in Eastern Province of Ghazni, Afghanistan. He didn't weigh enough to trigger the explosive. But the Humvee behind him did. "The Humvee blew up," says Blain, 25 and now a husband, dad and student at Azusa Pacific University. "I got thrown. I was dazed, then I came to and ran to the truck." He pulled open the door and helped the injured men out.

He's learned a lot in his two deployments to Afghanistan. He witnessed abject poverty, with people living in mud huts. And he witnessed the fragility of life, with buddies dying from Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs. "The stress level is there," he says about patrols. "You have to turn off your emotions when you're out there." That's what he did when word crackled over the radio that a vehicle had flipped into the river. Blain sprinted to the scene, shedding gear as he ran. In the distance he saw the wheels of a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected armored fighting vehicle – or MRAP – sticking out of the water. Much closer, however, he saw the ejected passenger being washed downstream. Drowning.

### THE RESCUE

"He was trying to swim, but he didn't know how," says Blain, who jumped in and pulled him to shore with a sergeant who ran up to help. Blain then

sprinted along the riverbank to the submerged MRAP – and dived in. Mid-air, he started wondering about the current; the stability of a 15-ton truck lying on its side; and just how to grab its still-hot undercarriage to climb on top.

Inside, Capt. Jim Fallon, 26, of Rockville Centre, NY, had his own problems. Within a few seconds, black water filled the truck and, from underwater, he was unable to push the 500-pound door straight up to escape. "I thought I was going to die," admits Fallon, one of three passengers trapped inside. "I thought I was never going to see my family again." Suddenly, the door opened and a hand was pulling them out. "He saved our lives," Fallon says. "He single-handedly lifted a 500-pound door by himself – not knowing if that truck was going to tip over."

Others soon arrived to help free the last passenger who had to be cut free from a restraint in back.. Because of his action, Blain has received attention that leaves him... embarrassed. "I'm not ungrateful," he says one day before the Army brass arrives. "But there were other guys there too. We were a team. Everyone performed exactly how they were supposed to." Maybe that's why, when asked how he'd like to receive his medal, he said: Mail it. No, the Army said. We're coming out.

### THE MEDAL

Fearless.

That's how Matt Blain grew up in Mission Viejo. At 10, he dragged home a 4-foot monitor lizard by the tail. At 11, he cliff-jumped 25 feet into water. At 12, he separated a shoulder and didn't tell his parents for two days.

"You know those situations where your heart starts pounding and your blood starts rushing?" says his brother David Blain, 27, of San Juan Capistrano, a lawyer. "He doesn't seem to experience that. He's never been afraid to risk his life." Because of that, he saved four men's lives. And because of that, the Army sent a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, two sergeant majors and two captains out this week to present Blain with the Army's highest award for heroism not in combat.

"I'm grateful for what Matt represents," Col Mennes says; "all that is good about Americans." With that, he pins "The Soldier's Medal" for heroism on Blain's chest.

"It brings tears to my eyes," says Blain's wife, Megan, who was seven months pregnant at the time of the rescue.

The medal connects Blain to General Colin Powell who received it in 1968 for rescuing his comrades in a helicopter crash in Vietnam. And to several soldiers who received it for rescues during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack.

"It's almost too much to take in," says Blain's mom, Suzzi Blain. "How can I be anything but so proud?"

As usual, her son is calm. The medal hasn't changed him. Well, maybe in one way. "Yeah," he says, reflecting on the man he admired growing up – his grandfather. "I think I fall in his footsteps a little more now."

## Pvt. John A Daum

Editor's Note:-The below is a follow up to the August Diablo article on John Daum.

Dear Thomas,

I'm writing to you after having written to Dick O'Donnell to ask for your email address because I wanted to let you know that we visited your uncle's, Pvt. John Daum's, grave at the American Cemetery in Normandy yesterday. As it was a very moving occasion, I decided to contact you after finding your online testament.

Perhaps I should back up a bit and explain - Your uncle's grave was the last stop on the official guided visit of the cemetery. I don't know if you've been to the cemetery, but John's grave is near the end of one of the many rows of graves closest to Omaha



Beach. The guide explained that one morning one of the other women who works for the American Battle Monuments Commission found a letter that was addressed to John and left by his cross. It was written by a complete stranger from Belgium, who had seen the picture of your uncle online and wrote a very moving letter expressing his appreciation to John. By the time that the guide finished reading the letter, most of the women and several of the men were brushing tears away from their eyes. John's story and his life became real - he was a person. The staggering number of white crosses makes the loss of life hard to process, but hearing John's story and seeing the photo of him on the letter (the same one that is on your testimony) made it all very real.

After I returned home from our visit to the cemetery, I decided to google John's name and found your online testimony. I've written a blog post telling the story of John and wanted to ask if you would like for me to make any changes. I've also included the letter that was written by the Belgian man, Yvan. Here's the link for the post:

<http://outandaboutinparis.blogspot.com/2011/08/normandy-american-cemetery-and-memorial.html>

I don't know if the American Battle Monuments Commission has already told you about Yvan, but please let me know if you would like to have his address. It was included in the letter but I didn't want to post it online.

And finally, please know that even though John's life was short, he continues to touch the lives of many of the people who visit the cemetery, including me. There was a single rose on John's grave. My family and I will take one the next time that we visit the American Cemetery.

Warm regards,  
Mary Kay (Bosshart)

P.S. I should mention that I'm a fellow American from the Midwest who lives in Paris

## Searching For....

Dear veterans and family,

Two friends of mine have adopted 508 PIR graves – one in Normandy Cemetery and the second in Henri Chapelle, Belgium. My friends try to find info about these heroes. After a few years, they have found nothing. I wish one day to find a story, picture or a contact. This research is just for the memory, your memory. These heroes are:

Sgt. Columbo De Paulis Co. G ASN 35589969 and buried in Normandy.

Pfc R.Q. Lester Co. A, ASN 38479146 and buried in Henri Chapelle.

Airborne All the Way,  
Sgt. Dominique Potier  
Belgian Airborne

## Get Well Soon

Jan Silver

On November 20, Jan Silver fell in her home and broke her pelvis in two places on the right side. After a brief stay in the hospital, she moved into her daughter's home where she was recovering when she began experiencing a lot of pain on her left side. She returned to the hospital where another fracture was found. She had surgery Monday, December 12. They put two screws in her pelvis. She is in rehab at present and will be there for approximately two weeks.

Get well soon wishes can be sent to Jan in care of her daughter, Karen Holton, at: 6953 N. Fieldgate Ct.; Baton Rouge, LA 70808. Or you can call Jan at (225) 235-1213.

## Checking In

Hi everyone,  
Here's my dues and a bit extra.

For an old fellow, I'm doing quite well! I'm still doing volunteer work for the VA and the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery office – I recently passed the 6,000 hour mark.

Last June, I went back to re-walk France, Belgium, and Holland and placed many Hawaiian floral leis at the various cemetery graves of troopers; also had a 6 June re-visit to St. Mere Eglise and Normandy areas.

Sorry, I'm not able to get away for the 2011 508<sup>th</sup> reunion.

Aloha to all,  
D. Zane Schlemmer  
Hq. Co., 2ndBtn, 508<sup>th</sup> PIR

Please keep me on your mailing list awhile longer.

Thank you.

Truman K. Detwiler  
542 S. Roosevelt Road 32  
Lingo, NM 88123-9702

To the Editor-

Thank you for putting in the quote by General Gavin submitted by Thad Russell.

Tom was an Irish boxer champion at West Point and I think he won 26 out of 27 matches. I know he only missed one.

And he was also a nuclear physicist. The army sent him to Princeton after the war and he was an advisor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon when he retired.

Thanks for printing the quote. I sent a copy to all our family and they really enjoyed it.

Tom passed away Jan 10, 2004 at the age of 87. I still miss him dreadfully.

Lucille Shanley  
(Mrs. Thos. J.B. Shanley)

(Editor's Note: Mrs. Shanley is referring to the quote by General Gavin "Col. Shanley is an Irish Boxer with the mind of a nuclear physicist."

Sign us up for one more year. If alive next year, we'll sign up again.

God Bless the U.S.A. and all Veterans  
Walter and Irene Baker  
D Co. 508<sup>th</sup>

Good luck and health to all. 87 and still hangin' in there. It seems like 100 years ago.

AATW  
Nick Pavone

Dear Ellen,

We have moved - from one retirement home to another. We have moved to a brand new apartment at Buehler Home, a top quality facility with anything from independent living (us) to an excellent nursing facility (in case one of us should need it in the future) and, to top it off, two of my cousins and my sister already live here.

The June issue of Diablo was a sad one for me....John Kersh and Martin Mortenson were both

fellow riggers and I had come to know Jim Smith well through our reunions and his continuing service in all things related to the 508 PIR.

Am enclosing a \$50.00 check for my dues and a little extra for good measure.

Thanks for all you do to keep the 508 front and center.

Best personal regards,

Carl H. Porter (there's another Carl Porter 508'er - living in Dayton, Ohio, last I knew)

Editor's Note: Carl - thanks so much for your donation to the association. Veterans are not required to pay anything and we appreciate you.

## MailBox

Hello Ellen & Dick,

On a farm in Groesbeek were found yesterday (September 12, 2011) the bodies of two American (Most probably 82<sup>nd</sup> paratroopers) soldiers of WWII. If I have further details, I will inform you.

Fred Hoek

Dear Friends,

Please note a new website, this time about the Groesbeek Airborne Friends in Groesbeek, the site is under construction, so not much information yet, but take a look:

[www.groesbeekairbornevrienden.nl](http://www.groesbeekairbornevrienden.nl) On the site also information about two new books about the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

Last Saturday we went to see the battle site around Liege in Belgium, not for the World War Two area, but the battlefield for 1914!, we went to a forest east of Liege, and saw a trench - clearly visible where 550 Belgian soldiers blocked the German attack for several hours, the Belgians were outnumbered, also saw a small cemetery for Belgian soldiers nearby. Then visited Liege itself and saw several bridges that were destroyed by the Belgians at the time the Germans attacked. Liege is encircled by some 10 forts, we went to see one of them on the western side of Liege, the fortress received a direct hit in her powder room and the whole fortress exploded, almost all were killed inside.

When you go to the website click on Luik 1914 and see some of the pictures taken

Greetings from overseas,  
Jan Bos

Dear friends,

I have received this picture from Mrs. Jonnie Chestnut. Jonnie is William R Chestnut's daughter. She has send to me this picture with her dad and an unknown soldier, maybe somebody have a name for this hero.

Sgt Dominique Potier



William R. Chestnut and unknown

Last Night (September 25) I had wonderful phone call from Edna Taylor who is the wife of Royal R Taylor who was a very great Officer in the 508 PIR. He was a captain when I first knew him. I am not sure what rank he was when he retired. Anyway Edna has just moved into an assisted Living facility and wanted everybody to know her new address:

Edna Taylor  
500 Waterman Avenue  
Mount Dora, Florida 32757  
Tel 1 352 735 6590

She asked specifically about Sgt Smith of B Company and Lt Homer Jones. I did not have the answers for her and would appreciate someone letting her know. Thanks for your help.

Bill Knapp  
2068 North Nellis Blvd; Apt 108; Las Vegas,  
NV 90115; (702) 651-3904; b70sknapp@aol.com

Ellen -

At this stage of my life you'll have to pardon my transgressions. I can't remember who I've told what but I've become a great believer in Jesus. Things that have happened couldn't have happened unless by divine intervention.

With my constant in and outs I try to have something to do every day. I'd be a sorry case if I started feeling sorry for myself. That's why I treasure our annual reunion get-togethers. They're real invigorators to the ego. Eisenhower's D-Day message - "The eyes of the world are on you" still makes shivers run up and down my spine. For those who happened to be there it was everybody's 15-minutes of fame. And this is my feeling toward our annual reunions. I have the feeling of once again feeling important and we oldsters sincerely thank you youngsters for making this happen each year.

George Shenkle

Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year  
Hi everybody. This year's letter might not be as exciting as the last 21, but it comes deep from my heart. Sandy made the transition at 5:04 pm June 24, 2011 after two months of hospitals, rehab, and hospice. The final diagnosis was incurable brain

cancer. We had two memorials for her - one in Las Vegas and one in Casper, Wyoming which her two sisters, Judy and Jan, along with her oldest son, Lance, handled. She is interred at Oregon Trail Veterans Cemetery, where eventually I will join her.

I have moved to a one bedroom apartment in the same complex and I am still working two days a week for Carquest, an auto parts house. I am the dispatcher and enjoy it a lot. My health is very good for 89 going on 90. My days are filled with a little video poker each day, television, and oh yes, I play pinochle at the church every Tuesday afternoon.

I would like to thank my two sisters, Judy and Jan, Lance, my son, The University United Methodist Church and the whole congregation for their support during the most trying time in my life. Many more people were also involved and if I missed someone, I am sorry.

I have debated with myself whether or not to write this Christmas letter or not, but you all have been so much a part of my life and I love you all so much and just wish there was some way to show it. If any of you come this way, be sure to say howdy.

Love,  
Bill Knapp

I have uncovered a photo of a B. Cohen and Bob Johnson who I think were stationed in Camp Cromore, Portstewart (sometime referred to as Port Stewart), Northern Ireland in early 1944. My Aunt (still going strong at 99 years old) gave me the photo - I believe she knew one or both of these men. The photo shows the two men dressed in military uniform standing relaxed and cheerful (both smoking pipes) in front of what appears to be sleeping quarters at a training camp. The back of the photo has the following writing... "TEXAS JUNE 1943 B.Cohen, B.Johnson". I live very close to what was Camp Cromore and would love to hear from anyone who knew or still knows these men - or from anyone who was stationed here during the war.

Kind Regards

Patrick McLaughlin  
49 Station Road; Portstewart; Co Derry;  
Northern Ireland; BT55 7HH



B. Cohen and Bob Johnson

## Final Jumps

Frickel

I received the "Diablo" in Mom's mail. Dad, Staff Sergeant William (Bill) Frickel died June 29, 2010 from complications of diabetes. Him and Mom went to many reunions and enjoyed them. We have lots of pictures from them. Mom, Violet Frickel, is now in a nursing home. I seen in the "Diablo" you listed people who have died. Dean Frickel – son of Bill's Condolences may be sent to the Frickel family at: 802 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.; Laurel, MT 59044.

### In the Footsteps of the 82nd

2012 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Emile Lacroix's "In the Footsteps of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne march. This year the march will be in the footsteps of the 508<sup>th</sup> P.I.R. The march will begin t 9:00 A.M. on Saturday, February 25 in Garonne, Belgium and will go through Erria, Hierlot, and Their-du-Mont Hill. Hot soup will be served in Hierlot and hot wine at the end of the march. Certificates will be awarded to the participants.

Editor's Note: If you are interested in participating in the march and need assistance with travel arrangements contact Ellen Peters.

### Third Anniversary Books

Copies of the Third Anniversary book are for sale. They are excellent quality, spiral bound reproductions. Price is \$15.00 plus \$5.00 shipping for a total of \$20.00. Books can be ordered from the website: [www.508pir.org](http://www.508pir.org) or direct from Dick O'Donnell at: (321) 727-1170; 760 Conestee Rd.; West Melbourne, FL 32904-1812. Email: [Jumpmaster@508pir.org](mailto:Jumpmaster@508pir.org)

### New 508<sup>th</sup> Book

Phil Nordyke, author of multiple military books, is now focusing on the development of a new work exclusively about the 508th PIR - its history and its men in WWII. Phil wants to include as many of the men as possible and welcomes input from all veterans and their family. He plans to have the final work published in a year or less so time is of the essence!

Nordyke invites you to contact him via e-mail at [philnordyke@tx.rr.com](mailto:philnordyke@tx.rr.com) - If e-mail is not available to you, call him at (972) 562-2677 between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. (EST). He cautions that the submission of materials should be copies only as the loss of irreplaceable originals in the mail would be tragic to all parties.

So, dig into the musty old shoeboxes or trunks and get out your documents and photos, send an e-mail to Phil and help preserve the memory of the 508th and its achievements

### 505<sup>th</sup> Newsletter Available

The 505<sup>th</sup>'s Panther newsletter is available at [www.505rct.org](http://www.505rct.org).

### Call for Dues!

Dues for the new fiscal year of Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Assn. were due beginning November 1.

Dues are \$10.00 per year per household. Multiple years may be paid if desired and donations are gratefully accepted. Please send dues to:

F&F508PIR Assn.  
3630 Townsend Dr.  
Dallas, TX 75229-3805

### Changes of Address

Please forward change of email addresses to [treasurer@508PIR.org](mailto:treasurer@508PIR.org) and change of postal addresses to Ellen Peters; 3630 Townsend Dr.; Dallas, TX 75229-3805



**The Diablo**  
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