

Keith H. Christen – Private to Technician Fifth Grade

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Communications Platoon from July 1944 to July 1945.

Keith performed an essential function as a low speed radio operator. He applied his skill in the battalion's combat operations center and contributed significantly to its many successes.

Keith served his country, supported a remarkable family and is highly respected in his community.



He is a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."

Keith Christen says: "I was born January 21, 1921 in Morgantown, WV. On December 19, 1939, I enlisted in Company C, 201st Infantry Regiment of the West Virginia National Guard. The summer of 1940, I went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin for maneuvers with Company G.

The 201st Infantry Regiment was federalized January 6, 1941 and was stationed at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. Six months later the regiment moved to Camp Murray, Washington, for a short stay.

On September 12, 1941, the 201st Infantry Regiment left Washington and went to Kodiak, Alaska.

I left the 201st Infantry Regiment during the summer of 1943 and went to Fort Lewis, Washington. A short time later I was assigned to the 96th Infantry Division at Camp White in Oregon. At the earliest opportunity, I volunteered for parachutist training.

I qualified as parachutist on March 25, 1944. In June 1944, after a short furlough and many weeks in the replacement stream, I was assigned to Hq1 of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment [508th PIR] in Nottingham, England.

At the time, the regiment was fighting in Normandy but we replacements were welcomed by the 508th PIR rear detachment personnel.

On July 15, 1944, the 508th PIR Normandy survivors returned to Nottingham. After holding memorial services for the hundreds of casualties left in France, the reconstituted regiment started a vigorous training program in preparation for the next mission. We replacements were quickly integrated into units and fortunately bonded with the combat veterans."

Keith Christen's experience in the 508th PIR paralleled the combat activities of the regiment as summarized in Chapter II, Combat Operations. Briefly:

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On September 17, 1944, he parachuted into a field south of Nijmegen, Holland to liberate the Netherlands. That night Keith participated in an attack through the city of Nijmegen, in a dangerous attempt to seize a highway bridge over the Waal River.

On November 11, 1944, the 508th PIR was relieved from combat in Holland and marched 22 miles to rendezvous with trucks, which carried the regiment to Sissonne, France.

On December 18, 1944, the comfortable life of the 508th PIR, living in a French Artillery Post in Sissonne ended, the Germans had launched a desperate attack to save the Third Reich.

The massive German assault created a huge bulge in the allied area, and started the largest most costly WW II campaign in Europe, named the "Battle of the Bulge."

The 508th PIR troops fought both the Germans and the bitter cold and deep snows of the Ardennes. They breached the Siegfried Line, captured or destroyed many fortifications and towns, and suffered major casualties, inflicted by the Germans and the lack of protection from the bitter cold weather.

The 508th PIR fought all the way to the West Bank of the Roer River where on February 18, 1945 it broke contact with the German forces and returned to Sissonne, France.

On April 4, 1945 the 508th PIR was relieved from its long attachment to the 82nd Airborne Division and placed under the direct control of the First Allied Airborne Army. The regiment immediately moved by trains to Chartres near Paris alerted to parachute into or near prisoner-of-war-camps to liberate allied prisoners, should the Germans resort to atrocities.

The war in Europe ended before the regiment could execute any of the rescue missions, and the 508th PIR again moved back to Sissonne, France.

After a short delay, the 508th PIR was assigned to perform security and honor guard functions for Eisenhower's headquarters, and moved to Frankfurt, Germany.

Keith Christen was discharged from the Army August 9, 1945 at Fort George G. Meade, MD. He had spent an adventurous year with the 508th PIR. During that year he experienced all the horror, violence, fears, joys, sorrows, and heroism one might encounter on the battlefields of Europe.

Keith was an outstanding, courageous and dedicated soldier. He performed effectively under fire, and was respected by his peers.

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Keith Christen earned:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Three battle stars
- ?? Parachute Qualification badge with a star for a combat jump
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation
- ?? Belgium Fourragere
- ?? Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army
- ?? Numerous defense medals including the Occupation Medal with Germany Bar

Keith Christen married Hazel Mae Harris on December 18, 1945 in Morgantown, WV. They have two daughters Deborah and Jane, one grandson and four granddaughters.

Keith retired from Puget Sound Power and Light (now Puget Sound Energy) after working 32 years as a system operator. In his retirement years, Keith and Hazel continue a lifetime hobby of ballroom dancing.

In 1972, Keith and Hazel made a memorable and enjoyable visit to Nottingham, England and Nijmegen, Holland.

Keith and Hazel reside at 6627 Penny Lane, Lynwood, WA 98036



Keith and Hazel Christen

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This Album is Not For Sale

This excerpt from the "We Served Proudly, The Men of Hq1" album contains the recollections of men who in their youth risked their lives in furtherance of our national interests. These memoirs are sacred to them -- especially those events alluding to activities in which comrades lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe.

This album was prepared for perpetual residence in the archives of the Camp Blanding Museum complex, operated by the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, Inc. Starke, Florida. We are grateful for the support and assistance of the Camp Blanding Museum and Historical Associates, and for their kindness in having the museum make our album available to historians, students, researchers and others interested in our background and brief history.

No reproduction or distribution restrictions are imposed or implied for the album or pages thereof – providing such actions are not undertaken for profit.

Copies of the album have been presented to the Hq1 veterans or their survivors that contributed information for the effort. To facilitate reproducing copies of individual memoirs for relatives or friends, the memoirs have been developed as separate entities.

October 19, 2004

~~George . Stock~~

Hq1 Album Collator