

## David M. Jones - Private to Sergeant (Oops!) to Private

**David M. Jones** Served with distinction in the Hq1 Battalion Intelligence Section (S-2) from October 20, 1942 to October 1945.

David Jones is a Hq1 "Hell's Half Acre" survivor (See Chapter II, Combat Operations - Normandy).

In "Hell's Half Acre." David Jones and Gus Labate shared a foxhole. A zealous German pushed a Schmeiser machine pistol through the hedgerow and killed Gus.

In all aspects, Dave Jones fits the profile of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation." He has contributed immeasurably to the successes of our country and to the welfare of the American people.



Dave was born August 30, 1920, in Oakland, California. He elected to tell his own story for the album. Parts of Dave's story are reported here, and parts of his story, like his first days in Normandy, are presented in Chapter II, Combat Operations – Normandy.

"Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, like all eligible males of the time, I was caught up in the patriotic fervor and on December 30, enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps, I had grand thoughts of flying high.

It did not take long for me to learn that there were some rather menial tasks to be accomplished in the Army Air Corps, and apparently performing these tasks was my future.

After about a year of drudgery, I volunteered for airborne training as an avenue of escape. I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for parachutist training. After qualification, I was assigned to a cadre selected to organize and train the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (508<sup>th</sup> PIR) scheduled for activation in Camp Blanding, Starke, Florida.

Our cadre of officers, noncommissioned officers and privates moved to Camp Blanding and activated the regiment on October 20, 1942.

I was assigned to Headquarters Company; First (Hq1) Battalion. It was the only unit that had enough recruits available to start basic training. I remained assigned to Hq1 throughout my entire military career, and served in the Battalion Intelligence Section (S-2).

Our section received extensive training in day and night reconnaissance, patrolling, taking and interrogating prisoners, and the techniques of building models and sand tables depicting intended drop zones and objectives.

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We learned to map enemy positions and strong points, and related intelligence gathering procedures. We became quite proficient and later demonstrated our skills on the battlefields of Europe.

After months of advanced infantry and airborne operations training at Camp Mackall, North Carolina, and large-scale maneuvers in South Carolina and Tennessee, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR qualified for overseas assignment, and moved to a port of embarkation near New York City.

On December 28, 1943, aboard the USAT "James Parker" the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR sailed for Belfast, Ireland, an eleven-day voyage. In Ireland we did a lot of physical training, received European customs indoctrinations, and accomplished some weapons firing.

Sometime in March 1944, the regiment moved by boat to Scotland and then by train to Nottingham, England, and immediately started an arduous training program, that included night jumps and extended field exercises. When the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR left the United States, it was a foregone conclusion that we would take part in spearheading the invasion of Europe. We were ready!

Finally, in June we left our tent encampment in Nottingham, moved to an airfield, and prepared for combat somewhere in Europe.

Employing three day old aerial photos, taken at very high altitudes, we in the Battalion S-2 Section built sand tables of the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR drop area.

Unfortunately, as we later learned, the aerial photos were taken at very high altitudes and many of the flooded areas in the drop zone area failed to appear in the photos.

We knew exactly the kind of terrain we would encounter, and the objectives we were to seize, etc. but no one knew exactly where the objectives were located.

On the night of June 5, 1944, we were watching a motion picture named 'The Littlest Angel' with Margaret O'Brian in a very emotional role.

I can remember tears welling up in my eyes, and at the time, thinking this was probably the last picture I would ever see. The movie was interrupted and we were told to blacken our faces, get our equipment, and load into the C-47s.

We were so heavily loaded with ammunition, rations and equipment that everyone had to be boosted into the aircraft.

We now knew we would be dropped on the Cotentin Peninsula behind the invasion force beaches, 8-10 miles from the East Coast and just west of Ste. Mere Eglise.

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As I recall, there were 18 men in my plane. This meant that only the first ten men could stand up and hook up, and start out the door, before the remaining men could get up and hook up, I was number 13.

I remember that there was a great deal of silence in our plane as we flew across the English Channel. I know my thoughts were very personal.

I remember passing islands that were probably Guernsey and Jersey with many red flashes showing from the ground. I do not believe our C-47 plane was hit by flak or small arms fire at anytime. At least, I am sure no one in our plane was hit before we dropped.

The last item we placed on over all of our equipment when we boarded the plane was a Mae West type life preserver for the trip across the channel. I remember just before our jumpmaster called for us to stand up and hook up, I decided to leave my Mae West behind.

I later learned that we had jumped at about 350 feet above the ground, and to my amazement, after the opening shock of my parachute, everywhere I looked was water. There was not much time to think, I prepared to drown, as I had never learned to swim. Not that it would have done me any good, for the way I was loaded down with equipment; I probably would have gone under water and stayed there anyway.

I was lucky; a breeze caught my chute on the surface of the water and aquaplaned me toward a tree-lined causeway [built up roadway]. When my chute wrapped up in the trees, I pulled myself up on roadway by using the suspension lines. I am certain that jumpers 14 through 18 were dragged and drowned -- especially if they landed on the far side of that causeway.

As I had helped construct the objective area sand tables, I knew generally where I had landed in relation to the causeway, and I knew in which direction I had to go on the causeway to get to our assembly area.

There was a problem however, the Germans had positioned machine-guns at each end of the causeway. I decided that by staying slightly below the roadway itself, I might be able to stay out of the line of fire. Shortly thereafter, I met my first American in Normandy and we teamed up"

After the war ended, Dave performed security force and honor guard functions for General Eisenhower's headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany.

Dave was a courageous, outstanding soldier, always cheerful and willing to lend a hand. He was always ready to go that extra mile to help a comrade.

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David Jones earned:

- ?? Bronze Star Medal
- ?? Purple Heart Medal w/cluster
- ?? Combat Infantry Badge
- ?? Invasion Arrowhead
- ?? Three battle stars
- ?? Parachute Qualification Badge with a star for a combat jump (Normandy)
- ?? Presidential Unit Citation
- ?? French and Belgium Fourrageres
- ?? Numerous defense medals including the Occupation Medal with Germany Bar

Dave eventually realized his ambition of flying high - for years he flew his own plane.

Dave and Dolly reside at 6112 Water Lily Commons #101, Livermore, CA 94550-8798

Note: David Jones' first days in Normandy and in "Hells Half Acre" are more appropriately synopsised in Part II, Combat Operations – Normandy. Especially his interesting meeting with a "friend."



**David and Dolly Jones**

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### This Album is Not For Sale

**T**his 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**