

# Oscar Fred Prasse - Private to Private First Class

Served with distinction in the Hq1 81mm Mortar Platoon from October 20, 1942 to February 1945 when he was evacuated.

Oscar Prasse was a courageous soldier, a trusted comrade, and a cherished friend. Oscar always seemed more concerned with the welfare of his comrades then with his own - and he was.

Oscar Prasse was a distinguished member of the "Greatest of the Greatest Generation."



Oscar Prasse died in 1992. He was loved and respected by many of his World War II comrades, and they contributed to this summary.

Chapter II, Combat Operation – Normandy, contains a synopsis describing the ordeal of Oscar Prasse and Joe Bressler

Joe broke his ankle when he parachuted into Normandy. At great personal risk, Oscar carried Joe to safety and protected him for the next several days - until troops from the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division found them.

Joe was evacuated to England and Oscar went to find the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR and help destroy the Third Reich.

In September 1944. Oscar and Joe were reunited at the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR tent camp in Nottingham, England. Joe was AWOL from a hospital in England.

When Joe arrived in the Hq1 area, he was told, "we are packing to move to a marshaling area." Joe knew this meant another combat jump was imminent. He threw his crutches aside and joined Oscar and Hq1.

On September 17, 1944, after some delays, a cancellation, and several briefings, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR parachuted into Holland, as a liberation force.

Joe Bressler and Oscar Prasse were with the 81mm Mortar Platoon – doing their unique kind of business as usual.

Hq1 men like Oscar Prasse and Joe Bressler were magnificent soldiers always ready to do their part. However, at times, men like Oscar and Joe viewed WW II somewhat differently than most participants.

They often wandered off looking for ways to improve their situation – liberate food, liquor, cigars or whatever condiments were left unattended by friend or foe.

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Oscar Prasse and Joe Bressler survived Holland and in November 1944, arrived in Sissonne, France, and were reunited with their close friend Mel Beets. {Mel had been captured in Normandy but escaped.]

The trio enjoyed the "good life" with frequent visits to nearby Reims and the more distant Paris. However, to their dismay, December found them in the embarrassing role [for parachutists] of "jumping" off the back of a truck in Werbomont, Belgium. They were expected to blunt and destroy a massive German attack launched to save the Third Reich. This incursion was later named the "Battle of the Bulge." However, the "bulge" was not on our "triad's" agenda.

During a Hq1 reunion in March 2000, Joe Bressler and Mel Beets described a heretofore unknown activity that occurred during the "Battle of the Bulge." With great glee, Joe and Mel entertained the assembly with a tale that belongs in this album.

On Christmas Eve 1944, Oscar, Joe and Mel participated in a 508<sup>th</sup> PIR extremely dangerous withdrawal from the Salm River in Belgium.

The 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was extended on a salient eight miles into the German area -- providing an escape corridor for the hundreds of survivors from the divisions that had been overrun and severely mauled by the German's "surprise" attack. Hq1 men were occupying the nose of the salient, and the regiment's position was perilous. The German armor and infantry forces were getting strong enough to isolate the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR from the main battle forces, and then systematically destroy it. The regiment was ordered to break contact with the Germans and withdraw.

When the order arrived for the regiment to withdraw, in lieu of assured destruction, Oscar, Joe and Mel were faced with a serious dilemma.

Should they abandon the precious supply of beverages, they had carefully assembled for celebrating Christmas and New Years? Or should they attempt to evacuate their hoard to safety?

The decision was made and a baby carriage was acquired to transport the beverages. Our heroic triad pushed and pulled that carriage all night, through deep snow, over densely forested hills, fighting the cold and German patrols - and always avoiding the Hq1 officers who would confiscate the beverages.

Note. Although, not highlighted in the historical books written about WW II battles and generalship, the planning and maneuver skills of our triad, in salvaging their "booty," certainly ought to be lauded among the best.

During the first week in 1945, the allies launched a counterattack to destroy the German penetration - and the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR ended up on the west shore of the Roer River in March.

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It was a brutal campaign that required assaulting the fortified Siegfried Line and breasting the deep snows of the Ardennes and densely forested Hurtgen forest while fighting a desperate German army in bitter cold sunless days. As parachutists, our triad lacked winter warfare clothing and equipment, hot food, shelters or transportation. Close to the last days of the campaign, Oscar Prasse earned a Purple Heart and was evacuated.

Joe Bressler and Mel Beets continued their patriotic duty of punishing Germans.

Oscar Prasse, Joe Bressler and Mel Beets survived WW II. All of them were decorated. They earned:

- ?? Bronze Star and Purple Heart Medals
- ?? Combat Infantry Badges
- ?? Invasion Arrowheads
- ?? Battle stars
- ?? Parachute Qualification Badges with stars for combat jumps
- ?? French and Belgium Fourrageres
- ?? Joe Bressler and Oscar Prasse were awarded the Orange Lanyard of the Royal Netherlands Army.

All three men earned numerous defense medals.

Upon the cessation of hostilities, the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR was assigned occupation duties as security forces and honor guards supporting General Eisenhower's Headquarters, in Frankfurt, Germany, and the regiment moved to Heddernheim a suburb of Frankfurt.

Our triad was separated. Oscar was still in the hospital. Joe had the necessary points and was returned to the United States. Mel Beets moved to Heddernheim, Germany with Hq1.

Joe Bressler and Mel Beets corresponded over the years and frequently met at 508<sup>th</sup> PIR Association and Hq1 reunions – but they had lost track of Oscar Prasse.

Although Joe Bressler made repeated attempts over the years to find Oscar Prasse, it was not until 1992 that Oscar surfaced in a nursing home near Virginia Beach, Virginia. James T. Wynne (Hq1 Light Machine Gun Platoon) visited the nursing home to verify the presence of "our" Hq1 Oscar Prasse.

Oscar had been leading a rather quiet life in the Medcenter Nursing Home in Virginia Beach, VA. Oscar said he never knew that anyone was looking for him, and he never thought what he had done in Normandy was anything special. Joe Bressler says; "If it hadn't been for Oscar, I wouldn't be here."

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Oscar Prasse (on left) and James T. Wynne meeting in the Virginia Beach nursing home after 53 Years. Both men had suffered frozen feet, and had been evacuated from the bitter cold, snow covered European battlefield in 1945.

In 1992, James T. Wynne hosted a Hq1 reunion in Virginia Beach. Oscar Prasse for the first time in 47 years joined his WW II company. He enjoyed being with Mel Beets, and meeting with his WW II comrades. Unfortunately, Joe Bressler missed the reunion.

Oscar Prasse died in 1992. Mel Beets died in 2001. Joe Bressler resides with his beloved wife Becky in Pompano Beach, Florida.

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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.

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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.

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**G. G. . Stock**

**Hq1 Album Collator**