

James T. (Jim) Wynne – Private to Sergeant

Served with distinction in the Hq1 Light Machine Gun Platoon from October 20, 1942 to October 13, 1945.

Jim Wynne is an outstanding example of the “Greatest of the Greatest Generation.” Reared on a tobacco farm, he rose to military leadership, successful management in industry, and affluent leadership in community and church activities – a path of achievement associated with most members of the “Greatest of the Greatest Generation.”

Jim says: “I was born July 30, 1922 in Battleboro, North Carolina a farming community, and entered the Army at Camp Croft, South Carolina in October 1942.



At the first opportunity, I volunteered for airborne training and was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida rather than the Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia. An experiment was being conducted at Camp Blanding to determine whether it would be more efficient to train entire units at the Parachute School in Fort Benning, rather than continue to train individuals and then assign them to airborne units.

At Camp Blanding, I was assigned to the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508th PIR). At the time, the regiment consisted of a cadre of airborne qualified officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and only enough officers and men to form the First Battalion. We were housed in barracks in an abandoned Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. We recruits had to complete both a basic infantry program and the Airborne School physical training program. The latter was designed to insure that candidates for the school attained the high mental and physical standards required of parachutists.



Our days were busy. When we were not learning how to be soldiers, the cadre administered the airborne school program. It included miles of running, calisthenics, hand-to-hand combat and the many unique ways designed by the cadre to stress our capabilities.

We were confident and proud men on February 3, 1943, as we boarded the trains that would take us to Fort Benning and Jump School. We were the most physically and mentally fit soldiers in the Army.

We maintained that confident attitude throughout the demanding three weeks of parachute school training, which included more running, landing apparatus and tower training, parachute packing and finally the five qualification jumps.

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On March 12, 1943, we proudly pinned on our silver parachute wings, sewed a parachute patch on our caps, bloused our boots, and went on furlough. My first days off since October 1942.

When everyone returned from furloughs, the 508th PIR moved to Camp Mackall. A new camp built in the swamps of North Carolina.

The next weeks were used to police the area before starting advanced infantry and airborne operations training. We practiced crew-served weapons drills for hours, improved our marksmanship skills, conducted field exercises, and made parachute jumps.

In May, we went to South Carolina and maneuvered against the 101st Airborne Division, and in September, we participated in the Second Army maneuvers in Tennessee.

In Tennessee, we had an opportunity to demonstrate our airborne skills with a night jump. After the jump, we participated in a few small field exercises, and then returned to Camp Mackall, tired but proud. We were rewarded with three-day passes.

We complacently resumed training, and got ready to enjoy the Christmas season. That was not to be. On December 19, 1943, we started a long trip that included an 11-day sea voyage to Ireland, then to Scotland, and a train ride to Nottingham, England.

In Nottingham, we lived in tents about a ten-minute walk from the city. A city of friendly people, numerous pubs and lively dance halls.

We trained for long hours, made two practice night jumps and spent countless nights on field exercises. We were honed to a war fighting capable force and were ready to go!

The 508th PIR was attached to the 82nd Airborne Division and on May 28, 1944 moved to airfields to await a mission.

After days of sand table briefings and rolling equipment bundles, we blackened our faces, bid farewell to our buddies, and boarded our C-47s, and we were told our objective was in Normandy.

I almost missed one of the most important adventures of my life; you get only one chance to participate in something as worthwhile, massive and significant as the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

Late on June 5, during a pep rally, I dislocated my shoulder. The medical people wanted me hospitalized. However, I had run too many miles, done thousands of pushups, and sweated out countless hours of training for this adventure, I had no intention of missing it.

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I protested so strongly that the medics worked my shoulder into place. A few hours later I was flying over the English Channel in a C-47 with 17 other Hq1 men - we were going to Normandy.

Our flight to France was relatively quiet until we arrived at the Normandy coastline, then all hell broke out. Low flying clouds, German anti-aircraft and machinegun fire, exploding planes, and pilots taking evasive action created an atmosphere of chaos and confusion.

We left our aircraft about 1:30 AM somewhere over Normandy. I landed near our equipment bundle that held a machine gun. I quickly retrieved the gun and met six paratroopers. We seven spent the next days fighting Germans, avoiding large German patrols and trying to find the remainder of Hq1.

Four days later, we approached Hill 30, a 508th PIR objective, and joined a group of about 40 officers and men. Thereafter, we fought desperate Germans, seized causeways and towns, and collected more 508th PIR paratroopers.

On July 13, 1944, the 508th PIR survivors loaded into LSTs and sailed to England. In Nottingham, we received a hero's welcome, although we left the real heroes in Normandy.

In the next few weeks, we conducted memorial services for the men we lost in Normandy, and held formations to decorate our heroes. Also, we welcomed and processed replacements.

The 508th PIR surgeon had not forgotten about my dislocated shoulder. He sent me to a hospital for remedial surgery. He meant well, but the surgery and physical therapy prevented me from parachuting into Holland in September.

I completed the required physical therapy and was returned to duty in time to join Hq1 in Sissonne, France, where it was recuperating and re-building after the Holland campaign.

My platoon contained many strange faces. New men had replaced the machine gunners we lost in Normandy, and men lost in Holland had to be replaced.

On December 17, 1944, we were alerted to return to combat. The Germans had launched a surprise attack through the Ardennes aimed at the English Channel ports. The front line US divisions had been overrun, and hundreds of men were killed, captured or were missing-in-action.

The ferocious German incursion covered hundreds of miles, and provided the basis for the campaign being named the 'Battle of the Bulge.' The largest, most costly WW II battle in Europe.

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We traveled in open trucks, on a bitter cold day, to Werbomont, Belgium and joined the allied forces trying to constrain the German attack.

The following hectic days were spent maneuvering by foot and truck to find and establish the best positions from which to blunt and destroy the swiftly moving German armored and infantry forces.

Winter arrived in Europe with a heavy snowfall on December 21, a bitter cold day.

On December 23, the 508th PIR was committed to providing a safety corridor in which the badly mauled 106th Infantry and 7th Armored division survivors could escape the Germans.

To establish the corridor, the 508th PIR, at great risk, deployed in an eight-mile salient that stretched from the main battle position to the town of Vielsam, on the Salm River.

Hundreds of vehicles (tanks, trucks, artillery) and men had safely transited the corridor by Christmas Eve. However, the 508th PIRs' situation had become perilous. It was in imminent danger of being cut-off, surrounded and destroyed by large German armored and infantry formations.

Therefore, late on Christmas Eve, the regiment was ordered to break contact with the Germans and withdraw to the main battle position.

That night, 508th PIR troopers protected by a small covering force plodded through heavily snow-covered forests and hills, fighting off strong German patrols.

On Christmas morning, the 508th PIR was on the main battle position – mourning those we had lost during the night, especially the covering force that included several of the Hq1 light machinegun squads.

After several furious battles along the main battle position the German attack was stopped.

On January 7, 1945, the 508th PIR launched a counterattack designed to destroy the German forces remaining in the bulge, penetrate the Siegfried Line, and seize the west shore of the Roer River. We fought through deep snow, on bitter cold sunless days without shelter or food,



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At least 40% of the 508th PIR casualties were caused by the bitter cold and our inability to evacuate the wounded - many men died while waiting for evacuation. I was one of the fortunate few evacuated with severely frozen feet. I ended WW II in Heddernheim, Germany, a small suburb of Frankfurt.

We provided the security force and honor guard for General Eisenhower's headquarters in Frankfurt.

I was separated from the Army November 7, 1945 at Fort Bragg, NC."

James T. Wynne earned:

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

Jim says. "I returned to Virginia Beach and my job with the Telephone Company. I married Paxina on March 21, 1978, in Elizabeth City, North Carolina."

Jim and Paxina actively participated in church and civic activities, and supported 82nd Airborne Division and 508th PIR Association activities.



James (Jim) and Paxina Wynne

Paxina Wynne was twice voted "Woman of the Year" by the membership of the Hampton Roads Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Division Association.

Jim has served many years as a director of the chapter, and in 2004 was elected Chapter Chairman.

Jim lost his beloved Paxina August 20, 2003. Paxina was loved and respected by many and shall be missed but not forgotten.

James T. Wynne resides at 1344 Lakeview Drive, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23455-4130.

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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.

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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.

October 19, 2004

Geoff. Stone

Hq1 Album Collator