

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
508TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
1942 THROUGH 1945 AND THE 508TH
PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
ASSOCIATION 1975 THROUGH 2000

BY

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FOUNDER AND PERMANENT CHAIRMAN



INTRODUCTION

This summary of activity has been written for placement in the museum located at Camp Blanding, Florida, the site of the formation of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The Regiment was activated by act of Congress on October 20, 1942. The initial group of cadre for this formation was selected by, then, Lt. Col. Roy Lindquist. He had been selected by the Army to command this new Regiment. Training started almost immediately because Army personnel centers over the country were selecting men for this unit, and they were all on hand early during the formation.

They completed some most rigorous training and bodybuilding during their 13 weeks of training at Camp Blanding. Their training was more rigorous than the normal Infantry basic training. Being trained by officers and non-commissioned officers who had completed jump school, previously gave them an advantage over most other units. When it came time for their parachute training, they were given permission to complete the jump school in 3 weeks rather than the normal period of 4 weeks.

Following jump school, which they attended as a unit, they were sent to Camp Mackall, North Carolina for additional Infantry training and several practice jumps. They trained in the rugged terrain around their camp and also were part of Tennessee maneuvers and the maneuvers in South Carolina. The men were in top physical condition, they were performing superbly on all field problems and, best of all, they were becoming good friends with each other in the process. They were given their first furlough and in December 1943, they moved to Camp Shanks, NY, prior to their shipment to Ireland.

They trained in the Irish Peat Bogs for two months prior to being moved to Nottingham, England. Wollaton Park in Nottingham was their home until after they made the jump into The Netherlands on September 17, 1944. During this period they made the jump into Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Following the Netherlands campaign, they were retained in France until being called up for duty in the battle of the Bulge on December 17, 1944. This summary gives many of the details of their time in combat before the end of the war when the Regiment was chosen to be the Honor Guard around General Eisenhower's Headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany. During all of their campaigns of combat, they were attached to the 82nd Airborne Division.

THIS ARTICLE IS
DEDICATED TO THE
616 BRAVE MEN
WHO WERE LOST FROM
OUR RANKS WHILE
LIBERATING EUROPE
DURING WORLD WAR II

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF 508 P.I.R. ASSOCIATION - WWII

The original idea for the 508 association came to me while I was visiting the grave of my Company Commander, at St. Laurent Cemetery located at Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. Bill Goudy and I were standing at his grave reflecting on some of the experiences of our time with this great man. We both agreed that he was truly a wonderful man and that any of his men would have followed him through the fires of Hell. I have said many times, with complete honesty, that Captain Gerard A. Ruddy was the finest man that I have ever met. I am now 79 years of age and that statement is still completely true.

Many have said that I must have gone through too many artillery barrages, or that I landed on my head one time too many, but, I still say that the idea to start a reunion came to me from Captain Ruddy during our visit to his grave that day. Captain Ruddy and I were very close. I was the Battalion Message Center Chief, and, as such, I was always close to the Command Post and Captain Ruddy. I was one of the very few men who knew that his middle name was Aloysius.

Upon our return from this trip, I used all of the facilities available to me at Hughes Aircraft Company in an attempt to locate men from the 508. I had my own secretary plus access to a typing pool. I had a WATS line in my office, and a boss that understood just how important this project was to me. I started with the name and address of 5 different men from my company, plus a 30-year-old address book with about 40 other names and addresses. The first move was a letter to each of the addresses in my file. I had already decided that there would be a reunion over the Fourth of July weekend in 1975 and this was a part of the original letter.

Through this means I located about 25 men and started all over with addresses given to me by each of them. Letters to the new addresses produced more and they had new addresses. This process, plus a lot of phone calls, letters to Postmasters all over the country and notices in the magazines of the V. F. W. and the American Legion, added more names. Every month we had a notice in the Static-Line. As a result, the reunion became a reality. By July of 1975 we had 227 names on our roster and there were 133 people at our first reunion in Chicago. We were off and running due to the fact that we elected officers and became an official association during that initial reunion.

Our roster continued to grow and in 1995, we had 1415 names on it. Our roster as of July 2000 had 1266 names on it including the names of 253 widows and 89 friends of the association. From our original 133 who attended the first reunion, we went to a record of 627 attending in 1982. We have held a reunion every year since 1975 and our present plan is to continue operating as an association through the year 2004 when we officially retire the colors at Camp Blanding, Florida on October 20, 2004. October 20, 1942 was the official activation of the Regiment at Camp Blanding and this date was chosen as the date for retirement at the same site as the activation.

As of the end of the year 2000, we have held 26 reunions in 22 different cities and 22 different states. We have made group trips to Hawaii, Mexico and numerous trips back to our territories in Europe. The 508 has monuments in many different places. Arlington Cemetery, where we planted three blue spruce trees with our monument. Camp Blanding, Florida, where we have numerous items in the museum, and also where a drop zone is named DIABLO in honor of the regiment. Also at Camp Blanding we erected a monument in honor of 1st Sgt. Leonard Funk, C Company, who was awarded every medal available including the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Our base camp during our time in England was at Wollaton Park in Nottingham, England. In this park we planted an Elm tree in 1978 and placed a concrete and bronze plaque at the base stating our admiration of the British people and that we

considered it, "Our Home Away From Home". Within the Industrial Museum portion of Wollaton Park there is a small display placed there by us showing the uniform, our flag and some of the gear used by us during our time in combat. It is another beautiful tribute to the regiment and the men in it.

In Normandy, France, in a town named Chef du Pont, we have two different monuments placed there by the citizens of the town. The main street through Chef du Pont is named "Rue Capitaine Rex Combs", in honor of Rex Combs who was in A Company. Rex and a small band of troopers liberated this town on the morning of D-Day. The two monuments honoring the regiment are located near the bridge, which crossed the Merderet River at the end of Rue Capitaine Rex Combs. At this site, we of the 508 association, increased the size of a plot of ground there by hauling in many loads of soil filling in part of the river. On this enlarged plot of ground, we built a small park filled with trees, flowers, picnic tables and beautiful green grass. Our flag flies at this site every day. The park is our gift to the people there and the monuments are their tribute to our regiment and the many brave men lost there during the liberation.

Also in Normandy we have a bridge named the 508 bridge. This is a bridge that was replaced after the original was destroyed on D-Day. It was named after the 508 in a ceremony held in June 1998. This is a bridge that crosses the Douve River into the town of Beuzeville la Bastille. On this same date the first street after entering the town of Beuzeville la Bastille, was named, "Chemin O. B. HILL". On the morning of D-Day, I was blown off of the bridge by German Artillery shells as I tried to get to this street. Fifty-six years later, the city names the street after me. Two other streets are named after 508 men. There is a CHEMIN JACK SCHLEGEL and another named CHEMIN TOM PORCELLA. In addition, there is a road named after D. Zane Schlemmer in the village of L'Angle where a monument was placed showing the spot where Zane landed on D-Day. The farmer who lived there, Pierre Cotell has since passed away, but, during his years he was a very good friend of all Airborne men.

The Normans of France are as grateful for their liberation as anyone can be. All of our visits there have been truly emotional experiences. The merchants in their towns and villages are always eager to welcome you and to help you with your purchase. People on the street walk up to you, thanking you for your efforts and many kiss you on the cheek at the same time. Most of these people are crying at the time. It is quite an experience if this is your first visit and you do not really get accustomed to this treatment after numerous trips. At this writing, I have been there 36 times and each visit has been a different kind of emotional experience.

When you are there, the people come to you and ask for your autograph. I have learned that they also want you to give them the number of your regiment, your rank and your hometown. If you give them your address, chances are that you will get a letter from them thanking you in French, or sometimes, in a form of English, for what you and your regiment did for them.

We are invited into their homes for dinner with their families and they usually always give you some item in remembrance of your visit there. Practically every home now has photos of former visitors and they are happy to show these to you. You can be sure that your photo will also be taken to show to future visitors. You are treated like one of their family and you find that the difference in the language is not a serious problem. Both of you understand what is being said and that you are considered as a very dear friend.

The people and the local governments have erected numerous monuments in the area honoring different groups of men who fought so valiantly against great odds in their effort to liberate these fine people. They are proud of these monuments and they represent a sincere feeling of gratitude to all who were lost in this effort.

The people of Normandy have taught their children and grandchildren much of what went on during their time under the German rule and they have also taught them the facts of the invasion. They used their boats to retrieve some of our equipment bundles from the rivers. They came to us and told us where the enemy was and how many of them were there. They welcomed us into their homes and many of them took good care of our wounded men.

There is an organization called the AVA, Amis Veterans Americain, which has served us in many ways during our continuing visits there. The real fire behind this organization until her death was Mme. Simone Renaud. She was the wife of the wartime Mayor of Ste. Mere Eglise. This was the first town liberated on D-Day and this was done by members of the 82nd Airborne Division. Mme Renaud visited the States many times, she greeted every American Airborne visitor, she was instrumental in getting the Airborne Museum located there.

Under her guidance, the AVA performed solely for the purpose of making American Airborne visitors feel welcome in the area. She arranged parties for them, she found homes for them to stay in during their visits, she was always there in case of an emergency. She was a dear lady and became one of my very best friends. I still miss her. She spoke very good English and always gave me a bad time because I had not learned more French. She was loved dearly by all who knew her.

One of her most popular accomplishments was the organization of her Junior Troopers. She had young lads of all ages and she talked many of us into bringing pieces of uniforms to her for the children to wear when they got together. Most all of the uniforms were much too large and the boots were also. I always said that some of those kids took three steps before the boots moved at all. The Junior Troopers were always on hand to greet us and we took many presents for them. Chewing gum, candy, balloons, wings, badges and patches plus more than anyone could remember.

After my many trips back there, I have many friends that I consider to be part of my family. Mme Thomas is a favorite. She is known to most of us as Maelou. It is spelled differently by many of us, but all of us love her. She is a widow lady and she has attended our reunions many times. She and her friend. Dr. Pierre Henriet, have visited us many times and we stay there when visiting in Normandy. Pierre once gave me the key to his front door. He said I was there often and he was not always at home, so, I knew where my room was. I knew how to turn on the lights and I knew where the wine cellar was. From there I was on my own. You cannot find a friend much closer than what I consider Pierre to be.

The current President of the AVA is Roger Coueffin and he is doing an excellent job with it. The AVA remains active in the original purpose under his direction and he works closely with the city officials to arrange activities for us when we visit there on the anniversaries of D-Day. We are happy to have him on our team and we are eternally thankful to him for all that he does in our behalf.

The first two temporary cemeteries for our troops were located in Ste. Mere Eglise. Ceremonies are still held there annually in remembrance of those brave men who lost their lives in our effort to liberate Normandy. The same ceremonies are conducted each year on the anniversary and we are assured that this procedure will continue eternally. Our friends there are priceless. They will keep the memory of D-Day alive forever. Other invasions have been called D-Day by some individuals, but, June 6, 1944 is the original and only day that will forever be known as D-Day. D-Day for the Airborne started more than 5 hours before the official start of D-Day. Those of us who survived are proud to be a part of that history. May the peace that resulted from this effort continue forever and may the friendships that exist now continue to grow even longer.

In Normandy, we are remembered well and it appears that this memory will continue for many years into the future. The children and grand-children of this area

are taught most of what happened during that invasion and most every home there has an American flag which they fly during our visits there. They will continue to remember those brave men who were lost from our ranks during the invasion. During this invasion the 508 suffered 1,161 casualties. 336 were killed in action or died from wounds and injuries received there. Another 487 were wounded in action, 173 were injured in action and 165 were missing in action. This invasion, our first combat, proved to be our worst as far as casualties are concerned.

When we visit Normandy today, we are welcomed by all of the natives there. We are invited into their homes, they stop us on the street to thank us for what we did and they have numerous ceremonies honoring those that we lost there. They ask us on the street for our autograph on any paper that they might have. Their homes and garages are full of memorabilia from the invasion. It is truly a wonderful experience to return there as one of the veterans. Each trip has more than the normal number of emotional experiences, but you leave there feeling like you are part of their family. Like many others, I call Normandy my second home, and, I thoroughly enjoy my visits there.

The people of The Netherlands are just as grateful as the Normans and we are welcomed there in much the same way as in Normandy. We have found the Dutch people to be a bit more reserved than the Normans, but they are no less grateful to our regiment for their liberation. In 1978, one of their citizens designed and built a beautiful monument in the town of Beek. This was accomplished by Mr. Toon Arts a resident of the town of Beek. It is made of bricks and concrete and is a terrific tribute to our unit. Many other monuments to our unit and others of the 82nd Airborne Division are scattered throughout the area. One of the drives around the area has been named, "The All American Highway", by the locals. This drive passes the drop zones of all of the regiments involved and the landing fields of the glider regiment are also there.

One of the stories resulting from the invasion of The Netherlands came to light in 1985. This was 41 years later than the invasion. This story involves one of the members of a Jewish family that had fled their home in Holland to avoid being captured by the advancing German Army. Like many other families, they had taken refuge in the home of other Dutch families. On August 23rd, 1942, Bert Jakobs was then 10 years old. His family had been taken in by a Dutch family near the village of Berg en Dal. This family stayed in the home of the Dutch family from August 1942 until September 1944 when the 82nd Airborne Division landed in that area to liberate the Dutch from German rule. They rarely ever got out of the house for fear of being captured. Some of the Dutch were friendly with the Germans and they could have been turned in by them. They lived in the attic of the farmhouse during all that time.

After the war, Jakobs came to America and started an auto repair business in Santa Ana, California. He lives in Laguna Beach. It was in this area that the story developed. Both Bert Jakobs and retired Colonel, Hank LeFebvre, were at the Newport Golf Course, and were introduced to each other by a mutual friend. In the course of following conversation, Hank learned that Bert had come from Holland. Hank mentioned that he had landed in Holland by parachute on September 17, 1944. Bert wanted to know where he had landed and Hank replied, " In a small patch of woods called Berg en Dal". Berg en Dal was the location of the home where Bert had been hiding for more than two years. Hank was part of the group that liberated Bert from the occupied territory. They became immediate friends and each related stories to each other regarding that eventful day.

Sergeant Donald Jakeway of H Company - 508th Regiment was the leader of a group that actually opened the door of the house where Bert was hiding. Bert met Jakeway and others of the group at the 508th reunion in Los Angeles in September 1985. At this reunion Mr. Jakobs addressed the group and thanked all of them for his freedom. His speech at this event was recorded by a CBS TV film crew for use in a new fall show to be called, ""Magic Moments".

Both Le Febvre and Jakobs still reside in California. LeFebvre has been very active in the activities of the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment Association since its inception in 1975. He has held many offices and positions in the association including that of President in 1979. He and his wife, Mary Alice, are enjoying retirement in their Newport Beach home.

The operation in The Netherlands was quite different than Normandy. The jump was made during daylight hours and the regiments all landed very close to the planned drop zones. The Netherlands is open country with large fields, no hedgerows and even though the opposition was fierce, the Airborne troops were quick to assemble and were capable of repelling the attacks in the manner that they had been trained. The Dutch people were eager to help where they could and all in all, this operation went smoothly. There were surprises, some very rough times and numerous problems, but, the regiments were able to operate as units and as a result, their mission was accomplished in typical 82nd Airborne style.

The invasion of The Netherlands was done on September 17, 1944. This date has become a day of celebration every year since 1944. The local people have built an Airborne Museum in the town of Groesbeek and it has recently been enlarged to double the original size. It has many items that were used by both sides during the invasion and the battles that ensued after the landings. It has one section devoted to those who were killed during the war in Europe. Fr. Gerard Thuring from Groesbeek has done many hundreds of hours of searching through the archives in Washington, D.C. in an effort to insure that their records are complete and accurate. The organization of Airborne friends living in that area has many members who have devoted thousands of hours doing volunteer work at the museum and in researching information for their museum. The museum is operated solely with volunteers and it is known as one of the best in all of Europe.

During visits to The Netherlands we have been entertained by the Mayors of all of the cities. They are happy to show us many of the art items that they hid to keep the German Army from taking them. They are always glad to welcome us and most of them speak English better than we do. They do not speak Dutch when we are in their presence. They have made a complete study of the action there during the invasion and many of the locals are trained to serve as guides for us when we show up in our buses. They have all of the facts for every action and the facts have been thoroughly checked for accuracy. It is always a pleasure to visit our friends there.

The Dutch people also teach their children and grandchildren all of the elements of war. They all know what life was like under German rule and they know the price paid for their liberation. During this invasion and the following weeks of battle the 508 had 681 casualties/146 were killed in action or died from wounds received, in addition to this, 389 were wounded in action, 80 were injured in action and 66 were missing in action. This information, in addition to similar information from the other regiments is taught to the children in their schools. All of them know quite well that victory did not come easy. The Dutch people are always happy to see us and visiting there is a rare treat.

The Battle of the Bulge took our unit to the Ardennes on December 17, 1944. We went there in large semi trailer vehicles, which we called "Cattle Wagons". Our jump into the Bulge was from the tailgate of one of these trailers. We left from an old Army base in France near the town of Sissonne, and, we were partially supplied on our way to the Bulge. We had no winter equipment, very few weapons, but most of us were prepared by the time we arrived in Werbomont, Belgium. We had no idea what we were in for at this time, but, the situation was made clear quite quickly. The Germans had over run the 106th Infantry Division along with others and they were rapidly crossing Belgium wiping out everything in sight. We were one of the units chosen to stop their advance.

During this operation, we were in for some horrible weather, knee-deep snow, a well-equipped and very determined enemy and numerous surprises that always go with any combat operation. Along the way we met several natives of the area and we made many friends. We found that we could survive with what we could find in the fields as long as they continued to bring us an adequate supply of ammunition. Most of us ate some very strange looking steaks, some badly chopped up chickens and soup that defied any type of description. It definitely was not the type of operation that any normal individual would choose.

As a result of our time in Belgium during December 1944 and January 1945, we now have some very good friends throughout all of the area where the 82nd Airborne Division served. Monuments have been erected by the people of the area in all areas in remembrance of the many brave men who gave their lives while liberating the Belgians from German rule. The Belgian people, like the Normans and the Dutch, are eternally grateful to us for their liberation. They are eager for us to visit them and they go all out when we go there in an effort to make us feel welcome. They take us into their homes, they take us to their churches, they feed us some exotic soup dishes and they definitely make us feel as if we belong there.

The main monument for the 508 Regiment is atop Thieur du Mont Ridge. It was designed and built by one of our very good friends named Emile La Croix. Emile is a member of the Belgian U. S. vehicle club. This club has WW-II vehicles of every description. They have Jeeps, half-tracks, trucks of every description, tanks; motorcycles. Weasels and bicycles. Every type of vehicle that we had during the war is now in their parade of vehicles in parades or celebrations throughout Belgium. They erect gigantic tents, they have Lister bags filled with water, they have first aid stations and communication centers, they have their own motor pool and in addition to all of the equipment, they also dress in authentic U. S. Army uniforms. The ladies are included in this activity and they show up as either WACs or Nurses. Many of the vehicles have names painted on them. One that I remember is named, "Blood and Guts", and, the driver of this Jeep always greets every veteran with a bottle of delicious Brandy. I have never been able to resist taking a drink from this bottle. I wouldn't dare.

On tours through the Ardennes, the natives arrange receptions for us in nearly every village. They give us delicious foods, some excellent wine, cider, Belgian beer and more delicious Brandy. Somehow they seem to have gotten the idea that we are inclined to drink a bit now and then. I can say honestly that our crew seemed to have a knack for finding liquids designed to keep us warm during our time there in '44 & '45. When the temperature is well below zero. Snow is up to your knees and you are sleeping in a hole in the ground, you welcome most anything if it will help you to survive. Perhaps that is where the natives got the idea that we do drink a bit.

There are two different organizations in Belgium that are working full time to keep the memory of our people alive. One is CRIBA and the other is CADUSA. Both work full time arranging tours, receptions and more in an effort to remember those brave men lost during this part of the war. They work together and the result of their efforts is a great visit for our tour groups. I hear from many of them regularly. We have corresponded for years.

In 1974, my wife, Margaret and I, joined a tour that was organized by Don Lassen, Editor of Static-Line, our Airborne Newspaper. This trip took us to England, The Netherlands, Belgium and Normandy. Our first stop in Belgium was in the village of Trois Ponts. The name in French means three bridges and the town was so named because there are three bridges in the town.

Our group consisted of about 44 people and we were to stay in three different hotels because there was no hotel large enough to take all of us. The first stop was at a small hotel and bar that had four rooms reserved for us. Here, 7 of us got off with our

luggage and were assigned to our rooms. We had no Belgian money, the hotel and bar had only one restroom and bath for the 8 hotel rooms and the family that owned and operated the hotel. All of the rooms were on the second floor with the bathroom, which had three doors. One came from the bar downstairs, one from the living quarters of the family and one for the 8 rooms of the hotel. More on this problem a bit later.

It was about 5:00 P.M. when we arrived, the bar was open, but, as I said above, we had no Belgian money. The bartender was the owner of the establishment and when he learned of our predicament he immediately phoned the manager of the local bank explaining the problem. The bar owner motioned for us to follow him to his car and four men went with him to the bank where we found the manager waiting for us. He opened the bank and changed our traveler's checks and American money into Belgian Francs. Here we learned that he had told the other hotels to bring their guests to the bank also. He stayed there until all of our people had Belgian money. Can you imagine one of our bankers doing something like that?

That was our first indication about how grateful the Belgians were for their liberation. We were in for much more of the same. When we returned to the hotel, we were greeted by a younger man who wanted to buy each of us a drink. He spoke some English and was thanking all of us for his freedom. We later went to a party in the town of Thieux and returned to our rooms at about 2:00 A.M. When we entered the hotel, we found this same young man waiting for us. He had a small wild boar toy for each of us. He was crying and telling us that if it were not for us, he would not have a family, a house, an auto or a decent job. He wanted to thank us for all the things that he is now enjoying. It was a very touching moment for all of us.

Now for the rest of the story concerning the one bathroom. Before we left for the party in Thieux, I told Margaret that I was going to take a bath. I was tired, hot, sweaty and a bit stinky traveling and I was determined. As I said, this bathroom had three doors, one from the bar, one from the living quarters and one from the 8 rooms on the second floor. There was no shower, so, I filled the tub, got the soap and got into the tub. While soaking in all this luxury the door from the living quarters opened and the lady owner entered. She said Bon Jour Monsieur and I replied Bon Jour Madame. She washed her hands, dried them and left. One male from the bar entered, relieved himself, spoke to me and left. There were no other visitors, but this was an experience. I'm not sure that I would try that again, but in 1974 it seemed to be the thing to do.

On several of our visits to Belgium in later years, we always held a party of sorts at Le Mont St. Jacques in a restaurant owned and operated by Leo Carlier. Leo became a very good friend, he visited us here in California and he assisted us in many ways in other trips. Each time we visited Belgium we had a party in the restaurant and each time Leo arranged to have the local banker bring his calculator and a large bag of Belgian money to the restaurant for the purpose of changing our money into Belgian francs. On some trips Leo met us at the border of Belgium and the country that we were coming from. On these events, Leo would arrange for us to have lunch with him and he paid for everyone until we got some Belgian money. We always repaid him later, but he never asked to be repaid. He was another example of how grateful the Belgians are for their liberation.

There are many stories just like these, which show the gratitude of the Belgians. I am certain that if you have visited there since the war, and if you went through the Ardennes, you have a similar story of your own to tell. All of the stories are heart-warming experiences.

The Battle of the Bulge was entirely different from the other campaigns. Our jump was from the back of a semi trailer, the weather was truly an enemy, the number of enemy was in excess of what we had been up against before and they were much

more determined. As a result of their successes in overpowering some inexperienced troops at the start of their drive, they had a momentum going for them. They were very well equipped and were being backed up by some excellent panzer units. Although our losses were somewhat less than those in Normandy, I personally considered this campaign to be our worst experience. Many times men were wounded and could not be sent back for treatment. Some died from the weather after being wounded and being unable to walk back for help. Rations were scarce and supplies were not always at the ready.

During the Bulge, we suffered 828 casualties. 134 were either killed in action or died from wounds. 398 were wounded in action. 273 were injured in action, and, 23 were missing in action.

Combat awards were not given to men in our unit without good reason. Our job normally was of medal earning quality. During the war our men were awarded 540 decorations for a variety of reasons. There were 19 Foreign decorations, 378 Bronze Stars, 7 Soldiers Medals, 118 Silver Stars, 3 Legion of Merit, 14 Distinguished Service Crosses and 1 Congressional Medal of Honor. The most decorated man in the 82 Airborne Division was 1st Sgt. Leonard A. Funk, Jr. He earned every medal available from the Army including the Congressional Medal of Honor. Sgt. Funk was 1st Sgt. Of C Company and he was one in a million. His men would have followed him " anywhere willingly. Our regiment was awarded a bronze arrowhead and 4 bronze campaign stars for the European Theater Medal. We were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. We were entitled to wear the Combat Infantry Badge. We were also entitled to wear a bronze star in our wings for each combat jump made.

At the end of the war in Europe, the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment was selected by General Eisenhower to be the Honor Guard around his headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany. This was truly a choice assignment. We lived in apartments with 4 men to each unit. There were water heaters, kitchens, bathrooms, a living room section and a basement for each unit.

While at that location, those who had adequate points, 85 were required for discharge, could chose to go home. I left there late in August of 1945 and was discharged early in September at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Several decided to remain in the service.

As I said earlier in this report, we have made numerous trips back to England and our areas of combat since the end of the war. Each of these trips has been an emotional experience. Each trip is somewhat different, but all of them have moments, which are extremely emotional. When visiting friends who are resting in the cemeteries in Normandy, Margraten and Henri Chapelle memories of better times return. We remember things from happier times with each of the friends. We hold a memorial service of our own at each cemetery and this too is an emotional moment. While touring the various areas we often pass places where some horrible memories are brought back to first this one and then another one. It is not at all unusual to see one or more of the veterans crying uncontrollably from time to time. We are human and some of the memories are not of the variety that humans ever get accustomed to. There is no way to verbally describe this feeling. It is just one of those things that you had to witness first hand.

I have made 36 trips back to our areas since 1974 and I hope that I can adequately relate some of my feelings over the years. We who are veterans, and our families are received by the people in every country in a different manner. The language is different, the people are different and their way of recognizing us is somewhat different. All people in every country are grateful for our help and all show it in their own particular manner. Personally, I think that all of them are equal toward us, but it is done differently. I will try my level best to explain, but I seriously doubt that words are going to relate the feeling.

In England, we are considered as family, friends, and, all of them know that without our efforts, they would have lost the war long ago. The British people are a very rugged breed. They withstood bombings, which destroyed their homes, their way of life and made it difficult for them to get adequate food. They did not complain. They rolled up their sleeves and with pure guts and determination; they survived and made life for the Germans miserable. They returned from many losses with a vengeance. They proved themselves to be able to resist and survive all that the Germans could hand out. They look on us now as friends who were there when they were needed.

Our time in Nottingham, prior to the invasion of Normandy, was purely delightful. We had just moved from Northern Ireland where the weather was miserable, our living quarters were miserable, the rations were miserable and training in those Irish peat bogs, was truly an experience, and, after our living conditions there, everything sounded like heaven. The Irish people were very friendly, but we were not allowed out enough to enjoy their comradeship.

We were most thankful to be in Nottingham. True, we lived in tents, but we were located in a beautiful area filled with green grass and the King's deer. True, we got into a lot of trouble on the first morning there when several of the King's deer were killed by some of our men but after the lecture advising us that the King owned these deer and that we were to keep hands off, this too became enjoyable. (By the way, the venison that resulted from that fateful morning was delicious).

Here we were surrounded by a brick fence, which was not so high that we could not get over it with ease. We were allowed to have passes into town when we were not out in the field and this was most enjoyable. With or without passes most of the men enjoyed tours of Beeston, Nottingham downtown and the neighborhood, which surrounded our park. Wollaton Park also had a large hall which most of us called a castle. This was Wollaton Hall and it was filled with many items and became a museum. Those of us who visited it found it to be enjoyable also.

We found the people of Nottingham to be among the kindest and most forgiving people that we had met. We took over their pubs and drank all of the available spirits long before their normal closing time. Their daughters and young wives were chased unmercifully by our men. We stole their bicycles at every opportunity and many nights we marched through the area singing at the top of our miserable voices. No one slept if we were going through a town as a unit. We were loud, boisterous, cocky, proud and I am sure that they were tempted many times to bar us from their establishments. They did not. They were most considerate. We were invited into their homes. We attended some of their churches. We took over their Fish and Chip places and we were everywhere it was possible for a human to be. I am sure that not many of us realized the many historic places around us. Our primary purpose there was to have fun and we certainly did that.

Many of us connected with families there and after being invited to their homes for a meal, we realized that they did not have sufficient rations for themselves. As a result, many different items left our mess hall storage area and ended up in English homes. Tears were sometimes shed when we presented fresh oranges to them or to their children. They needed and enjoyed the sugar, flour, canned vegetables, ham, juices and many other items in the sacks that we carried into town. I am sure that our officers knew what was going on, but; nothing was ever said.

Today we have numerous good friends in England. We visit them in their homes and they visit us in our homes. When we are in their home, they fly our stars and stripes proudly. When they visit at my house, I proudly fly their flag. It is truly a treat to have such a relationship with people from another country.

The Norman people regard all of us as heroes. If you are a D-Day veteran of the Airborne, in their minds, you have proven yourself to be invincible. You were the

answer to their prayers. They have vowed to keep the memory of those killed in the invasion alive for eternity. They teach their families to honor the men who are buried there and to remember them in their prayers. They are an emotional group who will never forget D-Day.

The Dutch people also worship our memory. They are just a bit more reserved than the Normans, but; in all of their church services and at all of the meetings of their Friends of America groups, they remember those lost in the liberation of their land. When we visit there, most of the citizens make an all out effort to greet us at one or more of our stops. Many of the Dutch people have adopted one or more of the graves of our men resting in the cemeteries there. This custom, started by the Dutch, has now spread to the other countries as well. We have some very good friends in The Netherlands and they are all well informed concerning the fighting in their area. During the war they had a group who wore orange armbands. These people were most helpful to our troops with information concerning the enemy and some were actively fighting alongside our troops. I feel sure that the memory of those lost freeing the Dutch people will live forever.

I have found the Belgian people to be the most exuberant and outgoing of all that we visit with. They smile more. They seem to enjoy life more. They go to no limit to make us feel welcome. They want us to know that they are truly thankful for our efforts. Touring through the Ardennes is an experience that I can recommend to any one. If the local citizens know that you are either an Airborne veteran or the relative or friend of one, you can be sure that they are going to do their best to make your visit memorable. Many of our friends from there have visited in our home and we have visited in theirs. Their friendship is more open than others. It is merely a difference in people and their way of life. I find my time in Belgium to be very enjoyable.

Hopefully, I have adequately described my feelings about the people in each country. I feel very strongly that each and every one of them hold us up as role models. They are all very grateful to us for our efforts during the war. I feel very strongly that each and every one of them will do all possible to keep the memory of those lost in freeing them alive forever. In every talk that I have given to the people in each of the countries, I emphasize the fact that the heroes are still resting in the cemeteries. We, who are still around are merely survivors. We were not better soldiers than those who were lost, we were not better shots or better trained, we were just fortunate enough to be out of the line of fire from the enemy. We are here to help keep the memory of our friends alive. Hopefully, the memory will last forever.

During the 50th anniversary of D-Day, we visited all of the countries involved and we stayed with the people in their homes in every country. As a result of that trip and also the result of my many visits with so many good friends over there, I stated that WW-II brought three good things to all of us. Number 1 is the liberation of all who were under control of the German Army. Number 2 is the many years of peace that we have enjoyed in these same countries. Number 3 and in my opinion, the most important of all is the many hundreds of very good friends that we now have in all of the countries.

My remarks were picked up by the Belgian Tourist Bureau and became a part of all of their brochures about WW-II and The Battle of the Bulge. I am now 79 years of age and my number one wish is that these friendships between our people and the people of the European countries will continue forever.

Thank you for your attention.

BEST AIRBORNE WISHES AND SOFT LANDINGS ALWAYS

O. B. HILL, FOUNDER AND PERMANENT CHAIRMAN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

O. B. Hill was born on October 8, 1921 in Fort Branch, Indiana to the parents, Ralph & Marie Hill. He was raised there in Southern Indiana going to school in both Fort Branch and Princeton, Indiana. He excelled in Mathematics, English and Literature and was not a good student in History. Before Pearl Harbor, he was employed as a construction worker in Indianapolis, Indiana.

O. B. married Margaret on October 21, 1940 and they had two children. Linda Ann born on August 12 1941 and Joe David born on September 14, 1948. They now have 4 grandchildren.

After Pearl Harbor, O. B. quit the construction job and joined the Army. He volunteered for the Paratroops at the time of his enlistment. He finished basic training at Camp Wolters, Texas. From there he went to Fort Benning, Georgia for Parachute training. After graduation from jump school, he was chosen to be one of the students for communications school, and followed that with an advanced class of communications at Fort Benning. He also completed a class of Demolition School at Fort Benning.

When the First Battalion of the 508th Regiment finished jump school as a unit. Hill was assigned to Headquarters Company First Battalion in the Communications Platoon. He finished training in the states with this group and was promoted to the rank of Sergeant with the position of Message Center Chief.

Overseas, he trained in Ireland and England with the Regiment and made the jump into Normandy on June 6 1944. There he was behind the lines for 5 days and was wounded on June 13, 1944. He was evacuated back to England to a General Hospital and was treated for injuries to his neck and shoulder until December 1944 when he returned to the unit in Sissone, France.

From there he was with the unit until January 26 when he was once again evacuated after being wounded and injured again. He returned to the 508 after getting out of the hospital and was returned to the states in August with adequate points for discharge in September 1945.

Hill then returned to Southern Indiana, rejoined his family and signed up for classes at the University of Evansville. He graduated from there in 1950 with a degree in Accounting and business management. His first position was with the Internal Revenue Service as an agent. He remained there for 2 years exactly and then went into private industry as an accountant.

In January 1979, while working for Hughes Aircraft Company in El Segundo, California, he had a severe heart attack and survived his first triple bypass operation. He was not permitted to return to work. He officially retired from Hughes Aircraft on October 8, 1986.

At that time, he and Margaret moved to the desert area to Cathedral City. In April 1989, Margaret was in the hospital with a heart attack and O. B. had another attack which resulted in his second triple by pass. They are both doing well presently.

The statements above are the dry facts about the author. What needs to be said is the tremendous amount of time, effort, money and spirit that O. B. and his wife, Margaret, have put into the formation and continuation of our association. It started in the Normandy Cemetery on June 6, 1974 when O. B. and another 508er, Bill Goudy, were at the grave of their Company Commander. Captain Gerard A. Ruddy.

O. B. decided then and there to organize a reunion of all of the 508ers that he could locate 30 years after D Day. Upon O. B.'s return, he used all of the facilities available to him at Hughes Aircraft Company where he was employed. Starting with 5 known 508ers,

he managed to have the first reunion in Chicago with 133 in attendance and the organization was born.

O. B. has been the organizer and guiding force behind our organization and has seen us grow to 1266 members in the year 2000. We have had 26 reunions in 22 cities and states. O. B. has organized many trips to Europe where the 508 is honored by monuments in England, France, Holland and Belgium as well as many streets and bridges. O. B. has a street named for him in Normandy and was instrumental in helping with the establishment of all of our overseas monuments.

He was elected as our first President, our Founder and named as Permanent Chairman of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association.

By

Hank LeFebvre