

VETERANS DAY



Today we celebrate Veterans Day.

For those who have served, for the heroes no longer with us and for those that are still fighting for freedom and protecting our nation; below are some short personal stories of those who have been part of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

WILLIAM D. "BILL" MANDLE

The following anecdotes, in draft form, were written by William D. "Bill" Mandle shortly before his death in 1963. He died from complications of a brain tumor-- possibly related to a head injury he received near Anzio, Italy in February, 1944. At the time these were written, he had lost his ability to speak, but not his reasoning or all of his ability to write. He left these notes for his children. He had always been reluctant to discuss his personal experience in combat, preferring to focus on good times, great friends and the great outfit he served with.

Just prior to Holland, William D. Mandle had been appointed Regimental Demolition Officer and Public Relations Officer. After Holland he was relieved of demo duties in order to begin the Regimental History. In Berlin he took over a German newspaper operation, produced Prop Blast in magazine format, worked on the book and a number of other "PR" projects.

Transcribed by Steve Mandle 2009. Adventures with a Friend

A friend of mine, Joe Forrestal, and I were AWOL in Naples. It was here that we came to appreciate the 82 nd Airborne. Our Colonel, R. H. Tucker "forgave" us with a reprimand. That spirit permeated the 82 nd during the war. Another time, when we were on the front lines in Holland, we saw a Jeep unattended. This was against the General's orders, so we took it and cruised into Nijmegen. Along the way we noticed everyone was madly saluting us. After a jaunt in Nijmegen, we happened to notice the front end of the Jeep. It had two stars on it. We had the General's Jeep!

Very carefully we drove out of the city, back to the regiment and "lost" the Jeep in the front lines. It took the General about three minutes to discover who had taken it. Because he had ordered no one to leave their Jeep unattended, we were "free" to go.

VETERANS DAY



I was in demolition and, for the next week, behind enemy lines, we set 2,200 booby-traps! Which proves it doesn't pay to goof-off in the war-time Army!

“Return of “Isted Lion”

After the war, in Berlin, we found a huge stone lion. It was almost three-fourths as long as a railroad car. This was the “official” lion of Denmark, shown on their stamps and official seal. One of the Kaiser's had taken it back to Berlin after an invasion of their country. George Fuller, Lt. in The Airborne Army, wrote the editor of the Politiken, one of the large newspapers in Copenhagen, and told him we had Denmark's lion. The editor played this up in his newspaper, saying that Denmark's lion was in Berlin, and what did the readers intend doing about it? Response was immediate and conclusive. They wanted their lion! Nothing to do but take it to them. This was a headache at the start, but what a finish! Crowds lined the track in Denmark to see three American soldiers and the railroad train. It finally got through (crossed out was “to us”) that what they really wanted to see was their lion. The war being what it was, there were bombed out places in the track and these had to be strengthened. It would be difficult to tell in this space what transpired in getting the lion to Denmark. [Printing of the 504th Regimental History]

Another episode occurred when a book D.W. and I wrote was approached. It was to be a history of our regiment, the 504 Parachute Infantry. All this started earlier when back in France, I mentioned the subject to the Colonel. We started gathering pictures from men in the regiment. A truck-load of PX supplies arrived in Berlin. Because everyone had his own “outside” source (from British, French and Russians) it seemed no one really wanted them. Under “if you get stopped, we don't know anything about it” orders, we took the Post Exchange supplies and headed for Paris, by way of Cologne. Cologne-- as we knew from coming up that way in Germany--had a valued stock of German Army paper used for printing maps. The only thing was that now Cologne was in the British sector, which meant that every vehicle going in or out had to pass through British sentries. With our PX supplies covered by cardboard, we entered the British zone and, in Cologne, during the darkest part of the night, we went to where the paper was. We traded the PX supplies for all of the paper a six-by- six would hold. Still with our cardboard covering, we headed for Paris.

There was nothing to do here but go first class! So we did. We contacted Draeger-Freres, one of the leading printers in the city. “Yes” they said, “we will be happy to print your book. But we have no paper and no rubber blankets for our presses.” These, in offset printing, wrap around the cylinder and receive the ink which is transferred to the paper. (note to rewrite) We did hear that some rubber blankets might be available in England. Having gone this far, it seemed downright criminal to be stopped by this last obstacle. Frustration, as far as I was concerned, set in. But Dave Whittier, who was my right arm, didn't give up so easily. Somehow he got a plane ride to England and located some rubber blankets that fit Draeger Freres' presses. Next came the “negotiation” stage. We had the paper, for more than enough to do the book, and also the rubber blankets. They had the

VETERANS DAY



facilities with which to do the book. A short session followed in which they agreed to print our book in exchange for the rubber blankets and the rest of the paper. Included in this printing was the container covered by parachute silk, which was a separate box.

The name of the book was “The Devils in Baggy Pants”. For a little scheming and conniving, we got a book for the regiment at no cost, plus one to send home to the families of those who had been killed.

Later, General Dwight D. Eisenhower said this was one of the finest histories to come out of the war. When he saw it, “The Devils in Baggy Pants” was the only one. Master Sergeant Francis P. Varelli, the only enlisted man in the 504 who had gone with it overseas, was the one who presented the book to “Ike”. Notes of Paris (these were somewhat disjointed, therefore rearranged), Oddly enough, one of the most difficult things I had doing in Paris was eating! It was far too expensive to eat at the local diners (SC). Because our orders weren’t official—and it took that kind to eat at any of the “official” places in Paris—I wound up for three days at the eating place of French parachutists. Here I met a person named Jacque Pinotean, a Lieutenant in the French Parachutists. His father was mayor of the Montmartre, which is the original Paris. They still have their own police force and city council. Along with Dwight D. Eisenhower, Franklin D. Roosevelt and other top personages throughout the world, I became the ninth to receive an Honorary Citizenship in the Montmartre. Just having that card changed things for me. A certain awe seemed to surround me in the eyes of the French. Also, I could eat! It was no problem for my friend, Jacque, to go to the person who controlled the French mess and say, “Look, there’s a friend of mine who has an honorary citizenship in the Montmartre. It will be all right if he eats with us, won’t it?” There was no trouble, and he only had to do this once. Someday, I imagine historians will wonder, “who was this guy Mandle?” The answer is-- -- I had to have someplace to eat in Paris! With my friend Jacque Pinotean leading the way, it was much cheaper to live in Paris. Jacque would say to a merchant who was charging us “American” prices—“He’s just along for the ride. I’m buying this.” Particularly, it was wonderful to go to the many places where no troops were. They were allowed there, but just didn’t know about the place. There seemed to be a completely different air in these places. It wasn’t the cosmopolitan glamour and noise that seemed to permeate the “tourist” places. Jacque did not speak English, and I did not speak French. We got along beautifully, however, with our “pidgin” English and “pidgin” French.

Holland-- 1 st Anniversary of Market Garden

One time, after the war, we were invited to jump on Grave, Holland, where we had, just one year previously, jumped in war time. Our Battalion made the flight and jumped. The people were wonderful, some of them even wearing jumpsuits, boots and the like. Particularly I remember a blonde, who was dressed in a jump suit. We had the division band there—they had traveled by truck—and ceremonies were held at the graves of the many American soldiers who had died. Incidentally, they were kept in immaculate condition! This blonde joined ranks and stood at attention while the band played and the General spoke.

VETERANS DAY



Afterward, she said she had met a sergeant, who had “proposed” to her. She had accepted. She was standing there because one of the graves had her sergeant.

ROY HANNA

I SALUTE THE NURSES OF WW II

After being removed from the battle field I was carried by British ambulance to the British Field Hospital located near the city of Anzio. After two days in this tent hospital I was moved by sea back to the U.S. run hospital in Naples, Italy.

When I arrived at this hospital I was placed in the ‘critically wounded’ ward that already had 114 seriously wounded soldiers from all branches of the US Army forces; amputees, head wounds, stomach wounds, etc.

I WAS KEPT IN THIS WARD FOR APPROXIMATELY TWO WEEKS. DURING THIS PERIOD THERE WERE TWO NURSES ON DUTY FROM 0700 TO 1900 HOURS AND ONE NURSE FROM 1900 TO 0700 HOURS. ALL THREE SPENT MUCH OF THEIR TWELVE HOURS CHANAGING BANDAGES, DISPENSING PILLS, RUBBING BACKS, FLUFFING PILLOWS AND JUST GENERALLY KEEPING THE PATIENTS AS COMFORTABLE AS POSSIBLE. THE ROUTINE ITEMS SUCH AS BED PANS, HOUSE CLEANING AND FEEDING WERE TAKEN CARE OF BY OTHER PERSONNEL.

During my time in this ward I had three lung aspirations because my lung had collapsed and filled up with fluid from the gunshot wound.

From this ward I was taken to the Officers’ Ward. After spending 61 days in this hospital I was declared fit for combat and so rejoined my old outfit as they loaded on the British luxury liner ‘The Cape Town Castle’ that was anchored in the Naples harbor. From here we headed for England to prepare for more combat.

TYLER FOX

(On behalf of those who have passed away and weren’t able to share their story).

We are now well over 70 years removed from the events of World War II, and the awesome tactical and distinctive achievements of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment’s participation in that conflict. With the reality of this fact also comes the sad reality that few of the men who played a part in those awesome battlefield achievements are still remaining, and the ones who are disappearing from our ranks at a exponentially faster pace. For the 504th, the Army, and the nation, it’s a loss of history and lessons. For me, it is a personal loss.

VETERANS DAY



When I think of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, a well of memories overflows. I think of being doubled over with laughter at bars with a 91-year-old Brooklynite who as a young man had stormed against NAZIs as a member of the 504th's legions. I think of being driven around in a golf cart by a 94-year-old and being given a tour of the citrus farm he still worked, after talking for hours about the valiant men of Company B. I think of sitting and watching the Dodgers game with 91-year-old Fred Baldino.

While I lived in Kansas and Fred in Los Angeles, we developed a strong friendship. He suffered from sleep apnea leaving him up at all hours, and of course being a teenager I was never in bed at a decent time. Every night we would message each other back and forth for hours. His son Frank and his service as an original member of the 504th were the defining things in his life. His area code was 91504, so when he would write letters and mail them, the "91" on the envelope would be written small and the "504" in huge numbers.

Fred had grown up with so many siblings that as a young boy he tried to draw attention to himself by running away. When he didn't like being on his own after a couple of days he came home and his parents had not even noticed he had left. Then came the war. Like most veterans, Fred loved telling the funny stories - how he and Leo had robbed a French bank in North Africa wearing hats that looked like sombreros and then literally running into their battalion commander during their getaway and having to dig trenches (they got to keep the money).

One thing Fred taught me was you always fight for your squad-mates. On Anzio, when food was scarce, a trooper from another company stole hamburgers they were cooking from a cow that had been killed by shrapnel. While on the front line, Fred fought the thief and lost, but he was unashamed as he later told me: "I didn't care. At least I fought for my squad." After the war, he was instrumental in keeping the veterans together and did more work than almost any other WWII veteran to help preserve the regiment's history. He was incredibly proud of what the unit had accomplished and tried in any way possible to give credit to the men who had fought with him.

Fred loved his family and friends like I have seen few others love. Even in frail health he would go to any extreme to help his wife, who suffered from severe dementia, so she could stay at home with him. He was also an open ear, and sometimes would reply with his one-line Italian phrases. He was wise and compassionate.

Fred got me in touch with another trooper who had been with the 504th since its birth, Marvin Courtney. While Fred taught me love and loyalty and so much more, Marvin used to always talk about life's priorities: God and family. From them, lessons abounded about every subject of life, and they were forged in their roots in the 504th. They endured the hardest of times and the best of times. These days were their defining ones, and their finest hours. They saw tragedy, pain, and hardship; along with laughter, brotherhood, and love. Those experiences radiated in their personal lives. To me, they displayed what it was to be a man.

VETERANS DAY



These men are gone now, but the lessons they lived out must remain. When I think of the 504th PIR, in addition to those moments of being doubled over with laughter at bars with a 91-year-old Brooklynite or sitting and watching the Dodgers game with Fred, I think of those life lessons they learned the hard way and the way they didn't preach them, but lived them in their daily lives.

MOFFATT BURRISS

(Written by his son, Francis Burriss)

T. Moffatt Burriss is one of our Blue Devils I Co. 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment veterans who fought during WWII. Also author of the book "Strike and Hold".

My dad, Major T. Moffatt Burriss, served in the 504 Regiment, I Company during WW2. He was a successful family man, businessman, WW2 author and Minority Leader in the SC House of Representatives for many years. But when I asked him at his current age of 97 how he wanted to be remembered: he said, "just give me a simple military funeral". The time spent in the 504 was the defining period of his life that helped shape all decisions and values thereafter. Recently he said, "I want to live to be 100 so I can go back to Nijmegen, Holland with my beloved 504 and my family." What a day that would be....

1LT Wilmarie Flores
2-504th PIR 1BCT 82ND ABN DIV