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508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association

SUMMER 2002 **Newsletter** Issue 88

3- 3

In Memorium

This issue is dedicated to the memory of O.B. Hill , who was founder of the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment Association.

Surrounded by his family and with his beloved wife, Margaret, at his side, he was taken from us on Monday, June 10, 2002.

The 508 sends condolences to Margaret Hill and her family.

Plans are underway for an O.B. Hill Memorial Service to be held at the 508 PIR Association 28th Annual Reunion in Laughlin, Nevada.

It is NOT too late to register. See form on page 8, or call Ernie.

508 PIRA Newsletter

Published Quarterly
Next issue September 15, 2002
News items must be received one week prior to target date. (September 15)

A Donation Hooks You Up

Paratrooper _____ Wife _____

Check one: Member ☐ Associate Member ☐

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Company _____ Dates Served _____

Campaigns: _____

For Association: $ _____ Other: $ _____

Signature _____

** Help to up-date you mailing address. Send this Form**

Make checks or money orders payable to 508th PIR:
Mail to: Ernie Lamson, 1135 Edgcumbe Road,
St. Paul, MN 55105-2831



Come to Laughlin in 2002

It is not too late to REGISTER!

240 are registered. As of June 15. Full REFUND of registration Fee if you cancel one week before reunion. Verify cancellation of Hotel reservation with our Treasurer, Ernie Lamson to avoid Hotel charges.

NOTE: Room rates are $19/night, Sunday thru Thursday. Friday is $42; Saturday is $54.

508th P.I.R. Association Officers

OFFICE	NAME	COMPANY	PHONE	ALT. REP	PHONE
Chairman	O.B. Hill	Hq 1st	(760) 325-5118		
President	Bob Speers	Hq 2nd	(561)-575-3011		
Vice President	David J. Nagle	E Co	(707)-823-1455		
Treasurer	Ernie Lamson	A Co	(651)-699-7366		
Secretary	Francis Lamoureux	G Co	(413)-583-2493		
Parliamentarian	Rock Merritt	Hq 1st	(910)-425-5818		
Trustee	Tony Yablonski	I Co	(410)-665-5867		
Trustee	Paul Hamblin	C Co	(770)-451-5015		
Storekeeper	Ernie Lamson	A Co	(651)-699-7366		
Company Rep	Bob White	A Co	(304)-727-3641	William F. Bauman	(618)-392-4710
Company Rep	Nate Silverlieb	B Co	(413)-538-8828	Frank J. Novak	(440)-843-7923
Company Rep	Bill Traband	C Co	(610)-532-4609	John Coates	(410)-531-2475
Company Rep	Frank Haddy	D Co	(641)-357-4362	Walter Baker	(618)-452-1177
Company Rep	Fred Infanger	E Co	(631)-667-8081	Bob O'Connor	(503)-649-2394
Company Rep	Ted Lee	F Co	(307)-265-2277	Tom Toper	(907)-243-3227
Company Rep	Lane Lewis	G Co	(615)-890-3638	Francis Lamoureux	(413)-583-2493
Company Rep	Harry Roll	H Co	(513)-922-0249	Warren Wilt	(316)-286-5469
Company Rep	Fred Gladstone	I Co	(912)-437-4687		
Company Rep	George Stoeckert	Hq 1st	(703)-451-4629	Rock Merritt	(910)-425-5818
Company Rep	Chet Graham	Hq 2nd	(925)-937-6839	Louis M. Manion	(502)-447-8250
Company Rep	Lawrence Jeffers	Hq 3rd	(614)-667-6558	Jack Schlegel	(914)-688-5772
Company Rep	Harry Kennedy	HqHq	(650-349-1998	Bob Abraham	(405)-789-2264
Company Rep	Heimer Swanson	Ser Co	(507)-825-3762	Dave Kuony	(402)-553-5324

(If your phone number is incorrect, please send the corrected number to the Secretary.)

President's Message

This has been an exceptionally unnerving year for all of us as we prepare to attend the 28th Annual Reunion of the 508 PIR Association in Laughlin, Nevada.
We recall September 11, 2001, a day of personal shock and National grief.
We followed with pride as our troops answered the call to arms in defense of freedom of the oppressed in Afghanistan. We cheered and supported them as they vanquished the Taliban. and continued the search for Osama bin Laden and his terrorists.
We witnessed the toll in human lives in Israel and throughout the world by suicide bombers.
At home we were threatened by anthrax powder disseminated through our own Postal Service.
Pipe bombs were found in mail boxes. Faith in the stability of our economic system was shaken by the collapse of Enron.
In spite of the assaults against our American values, the American people have rallied behind our President and have demonstrated to the world, as we have in the past, that our National resolve is stronger than ever.
Our own particular crisis in the 508th Association is the battle being waged by our Chairman O.B. Hill against cancer, his own personal enemy.
We regret that he will be unable to attend our reunion this year.
A friend to all, O.B. founded our 508 Association in 1975 and he has attended every reunion.
Our thanks go to Joe Hill, for keeping us informed on his father's status.
Before his illness, O.B. obtained approved sites for both the 2002 and 2003 reunions. Ernie Lamson has carried on with preparations for both reunions.
He reports that 260 members and associate members have already registered for this year's reunion in Laughlin.
Negotiations are in process for our final reunion in 2004.
The next two years will require exceptional leadership from our next President and Vice President in preparation for the retirement of the 508 PIR Association in 2004.
May we have a great attendance in Laughlin !
God Bless and Best Wishes to All.

Bob Speers

From Norb Studelska

Company Reps are asked to submit a Status Report to Norb on progress with their Company Albums. Some companies have completed their albums, others are still underway. He would appreciate a reply to his request from all company reps
Take advantage of the addressed, stamped envelope before the postal rate for 1st class mail goes up to 37 cents on June 30. Be sure to bring an updated report to Laughlin with you.

Time is running out!

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Secretary's Report:

Newsletters continue to be returned for incorrect address and many are marked : *TEMPORAILY AWAY.*
Association Newsletters will not be sent out after the 508 PIRA retires in October, 2004.
Your Secretary, (and Newsletter Editor) will propose to the Board a 508 website which can serve as a clearing house for information on 508 mini-reunions and activities which can be publicized over the Internet.
Any computer-savvy members of the Association are requested to provide input into possible links to facilitate such a project.
We are looking for a good WEBMASTER !

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From the Board of Directors:

The ad-hoc Committee to draw up a "preferred" Association retirement ceremony scenario and "final" reunion agenda have been hard at work **since March 24, 2002.** ***They deserve a vote of THANKS!*** Serving on the committee are President, Bob Speers, Paul Hamblin, Kenneth (Rock) Merritt and George Stoeckert. They have been with the Retirement Advisory Committee from the beginning in 1997. (Who says the 508 doesn't **think ahead?**)
The Board of Directors are scheduled to study these proposals in Laughlin.
The plan is to ***"Retire with Dignity."***

Tribute to O.B. Hill
Founder and Permanent Chairman
508 Parachute Infantry Regiment Association



O.B. was known for his genuine smile. It radiated deep from within his generous heart. When he met you, he chuckled and asked, "How's the little woman?"
Beneath the good-natured humor of the man was a well-spring of emotion. He had a deep-seated respect for the men of the 508 who served beside him in Normandy.
This became apparent when he talked about his Company Commander, Captain Gerard A. Ruddy who was killed in Normandy.
In 1979 he visited Captain Ruddy's grave at the American Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach. With O.B. was his comrade, Bill Goudy. They had served together in Headquarters Company, First Batallion.
As they stood reading the inscription on Captain Ruddy's cross they talked about how his men would have followed him through the fires of Hell.
"He was the finest man that I have ever met", said O.B.

The inspiration for forming the 508 Association came on that day in 1974.
"It was Captain Ruddy who made me do it", claimed O.B. "I started as soon as I got back to California.".
With names and addresses of five Hq 1st comrades, and a 30 year address book O.B went to work. He made phone calls, wrote letters, put notices in Veterans' magazines and a monthly notice in the Static Line. By July 1975 there were 227 names on the roster and the first reunion was held in Chicago, where 133 showed up. In 1982 a record 627 attended the reunion in Fayetteville, North Carolina to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Activation of the 508 PIR at Camp Blanding, Florida.
Since then, attendance at reunions has continued to decline, but our roster has now reached 1280. At the 27th Annual reunion in Tampa, Florida in 2001 there were 364 in attendance at the banquet.
Over the years, O.B and his wife Margaret have made many trips to England, Normandy, the Netherlands and to Belgium. Joe D. Hill accompanied his father on one of these tours of 508 Battlefields in Europe.
"He has been the Greatest Ambassador for the United States anyone could have," Joe says of his father.
O.B. was equally well known by the Airborne Community in the U.S. as the Chief spokes-person for the 508.
He was comforted during his final days by letters, cards and prayers from those who knew and loved him. On June 10, 2002, he breathed his last.

Send Condolences to:
Mrs. Margaret Hill
67380 Tamara Rd.
Cathedral City, CA 92234-3454

At the 28th Annual Reunion in Laughlin, Nevada, there will be a special service to Celebrate the Life of O.B. Hill



We Remember the Good Times With O.B. and Margaret

Our Chairman cannot be replaced, but the life of the beloved 508 Association which O.B. founded continues.

Your participation in our final reunions is important to us. We realize that for some, it can be a hardship to travel. Now is the time to consider taking a son or a daughter to the reunion with you. If they have never been to a reunion, now is the time for them to meet all the people they have heard you talk about for many years We can promise you – it will be the experience of a lifetime for them, --- and for YOU!

YES, there will be a business meeting in Laughlin.

What to expect? **Election of Officers: Chairman of the Nominating Committee, Darrell Glass will present a slate of Officers for 2002-2003. Zig Boroughs, Harry Hudec and Dave Kuony serve with Darrell.**

ITEMS of INTEREST:

Daniel Furlong (H Co) was awarded theNormandy Medal of the Jubilee of Liberty by Alaska Senator, Ted Stevens at a ceremonyin Anchorage, Alaska on May 28, 2002.
As he accepted the medal Furlong said, "I accept this medal for the friends we left in Normandy. They're the ones who really made the sacrifice." (From Tom Toper, F company.)

From George Stoeckert (HQ !st);
The Washington Post dated June 6, 2002 tells how **Pretot,** a village of 500 dedicated **La Place du Colonel Mendez** as a tribute to Colonel Louis G. Mendez who commanded the 3rd Battallion of the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment in the battle which liberated the little village on June 20, 1944. Colonel Mendez earned the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest military honor for his leadership in this action.
Jeannie Mendez , accompanied by eight of their twelve children, seven of the spouses and nine grandchildren were honored by the people of Pretot, both young and old, some of whom still had memories of that day on which they were liberated.
Among veterans of the 508 who had participated in the liberation of Pretot was Tom Porcella (H Co).
Dominique Francois a Historian who lives in Picauville, close to Pretot, has just published a book which recounts the history of the 508. Before he died, Colonel Mendez wrote the preface to the book.
Dominique, for many years a friend to men of the 508 who return to Normandy for the D-Day celebrations conceived the idea of commemorating Colonel Mendez..
He explained, "The people of Normandy are different from the Parisians. Here, the Americans are venerated."

Editor's Note:
Dominique has been a frequent visitor to our 508 reunions. In Tampa he was the guest of Tom Porcella and Chet Graham.

Our 508 Paratroopers in the NEWS

Charles J. Thompson (Service Co.) and his wife Janet.

Charles was guest speaker at the Fort Lee Officers Club on December 7, 2001 to observe the 60th Anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.
He recalled standing in line at 0755 hrs in the mess hall at Schoefield Barracks the moment the attack began. He was a heavy weapons platoon sergeant in M Company of the 27th Infantry Regiment. During the bombardment he manned a .30 caliber machine gun on the top of his barracks. It was his first taste of combat. "I'll never forget my Baptism of Fire', he told Colonel Mills, Director of the Advanced Officers Course and the guests at the banquet.
In his remarks he described the carnage, his actions and what he observed during the 24-hour period following the Pearl Harbor attack. He reminded the officers that December 7, 1941 was truly a "Day that will Go Down in Infamy!"
For the vivid account of his experiences Charles Thompson received a standing ovation.

Hq Co. 1st Bn take over New Orleans.

(Excerpted from Newsletter sent by George Stoeckert)
Ray and Edna Kennedy hosted the 14th Annual Mini-Reunion at historic Le Pavilion Hotel with nearly 40 in attendance. Many well known 508'ers were there as guests. Everyone had a wonderful time.
Laura Palmer offered to host the 15th reunion in Augusta, Georgia in 2003. As soon as available, George Stoeckert will relay details to those interested. If you have never been – don't miss it!

Gene Merritt (brother of "Rock" Merritt) was unable to attend. He is seriously ill, but George tells us, "He is a real fighter -- - He lives on optimism, prayers and being helpful to others." (Sounds like George) Gene is an Associate member. Say a prayer, send him a card and let him know you care.
Gene Merritt, 12332 E 16th Place 5
Tulsa, OK 74128

Garfield Wilkinson ("Wilkie") has been hospitalized in Salisbury, Maryland. Help cheer him up. Send a card to P.O. Box 272, Hartly, DE 19953-0272

The 508 Connection

Our own **"Rock" Merritt** was guest of the 1st Battalion 508 Parachute Infantry as they toured WWII battle sites in Normandy.
On April 12, 2002 he met them at Ste. Mere-Eglise. The next day they made a jump on the DZ originally assigned for the June 6,1944 jump by the original 508. (Our 508)
As he watched the active duty 508 troopers, "Rock" recalled how he and his stick had missed that DZ 58 years ago.
After the jump he went with them to Hill 30, then to Hill 95 and to Hill 131.
As resource person , "Rock" gave the young paratroopers an eye-witness account of how the 508 of 1944 showed the 'right stuff' throughout their 33 days , without relief, in combat against the German forces.
You bet your paratrooper boots, these young fellows were impressed! "Rock" recreated a lot of history for them with his first-hand accounts.
At a dinner hosted by the Mayor of Ste. Mere-Eglise, Mme. Edith Coueffin sang a song which she dedicated to O.B. Hill.
"Rock" asked her the name of the song.
She said, "Ask O.B. – he'll know it, because every time I sing it O.B. cries."
Rounding out his tour of "temporary duty" with the 508 1st Battalion, Rock placed wreaths at the graves of Captain Ruddy and Private John Pavlick at the St. Laurent Cemetery.
He arrived home in Fayetteville on April 16.
"A great trip! Enjoyed every moment of it."

E-mail from Tony Rogers (from England)

To all WWII veterans of the 508 PIR and their families:
Here it is again, June 5, 2002 – a night I do not forget.
Fifty eight years ago as a lad 13 years old I went to bed on the night of June 5, 1944. I slept very soundly that night, without a care in the world. Next morning I awoke to learn of the mighty opertion of allied military might which shook the world. I learned that the Continent had been invaded and that the long awaited day, which shall always be remembered as "D-DAY", had begun
It is with great pride that I count so many of you of the 508 as my friends. We can never repay you for what you did to make this world a better place. I speak on behalf of a grateful nation and say, ***"May God Bless each and every one of you!"***

Taps

Day is done, gone the sun from the lake,
from the hills, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest. God is nigh.

Don Hardwick, (HqHq) died peacefully May 15, 2002 in San Antonio, Texas. He was interred at Santa Fe, New Mexico National Cemetery with full military honors.
He was original cadre at **Camp Blanding**, and Battalion Demolition Officer in all 508 campaigns. He is survived by twin sons Craig and Bruce and their families. (Letter from **Bob Abraham, (Hq Hq) & Willard Davis (Ser Co)**

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Albert Wise, (Hq 2nd) died March 21, 2002. (Phone call from his wife, Kathryn to Ernie Lamson.) Send condolences to:
Rt. 1, Box 140, Kennerdell, PA 16374-9502

Walter (Wally) Piippo, (D, Co) died December 17, 2001 at the Jacobbetti Home for for Veterans in Michigan.. Wally battled renal failure for five years. He was age 80. Condolences may be sent to his wife Gloria at:
N 495 State Rd. 94, Chatham, MI 49816.
(m Norb Studelska)

Wayne Leathers, (C Co) died December 16, Fro2001. He leaves his wife, Beverly.
102 South St., Ridgeway, PA 15853-2009
(From Frank Longetti)

Wlliam W. Bell, (A Co) Date of death is unknown Reported by Bob White who read it in Static Line. Send condolences to:
Mrs. William W. Bell, 1212 Mantle Way,
Tom's River, NJ 08753
(His wife's name is Aileen)

Marion F. Whiting, (A Co)died January 7, 2002. Send condolences to his wife Mary Anne: 1400 NE 2nd Ave. Apt 1516,
Portland, OR 97232
(From Bob White, "A" Company Rep.)

James J. Murphy (H Co), died at home January 26, 2002. (Phone call from Harry Roll)
Send condolences to his wife, Phyllis:
13 Balmoral Ct., Zionsville, IN 46077-1900

Jacob Tschirart, (F Co)
Died December 4, 2001 of a heart attack. (Letter from his wife, Marcelline to Ted Lee)
Send condolences to: Mrs. Jacob Tschirart, 29859 Lori, Livonia, MI 48154

Jim Convy (Hq 3rd). His death was reported via e-mail from Pat Casanova (Hq 3rd) and from Joe Kissane, (G Co). Send condolences to his wife Helen at :
14 De Witt St., Valley Stream, LI 11580-2219

Ted R. McDonald (B Co) died 24 April 2002. He was buried with full military honors. Send condolences to his wife, Donna at:
6477 Peppertree Path NE,
Winter Haven, FL 33881-9587

Jim Yakey, (I Co) died October 4, 2001 in Kerville, Texas. He was hit on the Normandy jump and was awarded the Purple Heart. He was hospitalized for one year as a result of his combat wounds. He is survived by his wife, Mary, two daughters and a son. **(**News from **Fred Gladstone (I Co rep)**

****

Joe Auclair, (I Co), died at home on April 15, 2001. He was 84. His funeral services were held in St. Augustine, FL, but he was buried in Paxton, Massachusetts with military honors and Taps. (Letter from his wife, Lorriane to **Fred Gladstone**.)

****

Wilma MacLeod, (AM, H Co), died April 30, 2002. She leaves her husband, **Robert (Bob) Mcleod** , (H Co) and 2 sons, Robert and Ken and two daughters, Linda and Angela.
Send condolences to : 1041 Day Dr., Lexington, TN 38351. (Phone call from Harry Roll, (H Co. rep.)

William K. Sommers, (F Co), died September 26, 2001. Send condolences to his wife, Helen at : 750 Old Leechburg Rd., Pittsburg, PA 15329-1451
(Sent in by **Tom Toper,** *alternate rep, F Co.)*

508th P.I.R. Association
28th Annual Reunion *** 08/04 thru 08/07, 2002
Laughlin, Nevada

NAME: Mr----------Wife: ----------Company----

ADDRESS:----------Telephone:----------

CITY: ----------STATE .....ZIP .....

I WILL HAVE ..... GUESTS. NAMES FOR THEIR ID'S ARE LISTED BELOW:

1. 2. 3. 4.

The fee per person is $65.00.
ENCLOSED IS: $_____ registration FEE for _____ PEOPLE.
Send THIS WHOLE PAGE in with your check and HOTEL RESERVATION

HOTEL RESERVATIONS

Registration (Sunday)		**8/04**	☐ **King-size Bed** ☐ **Double bed**
Company Rep Meeting (Sun.)	**4P.M.**	**8/04**	☐ **Non-Smoking Room**
Memorial Breakfast (Monday)	**9A.M.**	**8/05**	
Pictures (Monday)	**11A.M**	**8/05**	
Business Meeting (Tuesday)	**9A.M.**	**8/06**	**Arrival date will be _____**
Banquet (Tuesday)	**7P.M.**	**8/06**	**Time_____A.M._____P.M.**
Farewell Breakfast (Wednesday)	**9A.M.**	**8/07**	**Checkout DATE _____**

Please make all checks or money orders payable to: 508th P.I.R. Association.
Send this pre-registration form with hotel reservation information and check or money order to:
Ernie Lamson, 1135 Edgcumbe Rd., St. Paul, MN 55105 Ph (651) 699-7366
**** No money is required at this time for Hotel Reservations..
If you have questions you may contact the Hotel at **Ramada Express, Inc.**
2121 South Casino Dr., Laughlin, NV 89028; Tel: 702-298-4200
Please Note: To set up a room for a Company CP, contact Ernie Lamson to obtain group rate.
Pre-registration STOPS 3 weeks before the REUNION. Late reservations made at the HOTEL
ALL Changes must be made through ERNIE to avoid FALSE BILLING! And MIX-UPS!

NEWS FLASH *** NEWS FLASH *** NOTE !!!

FLIGHTS are NOW AVAILABLE to Laughlin via SUN COUNTRY AIRLINES !!!
Check with your local Travel Agent. (Connections thru most Western Cities)
##########