Holland Veteran Still With 82nd Div.; Looks Back 26 Years to Campaign

by Spec. 4 Ted Painter

82nd ABN DIV—Twenty-six years ago this September the 82nd Airborne Division jumped into Holland and began a campaign which lasted nearly two months and saw combat troops of the ALL AMERICAN division on German soil for the first time in World War II.

One man who made that jump and fought through the campaign has recently rejoined the division after completing his second tour in Viet Nam. Chief Warrant Officer Marvin L. Risnes, 48, is now an engineer equipment maintenance officer with the 307th Engineer Battalion. In September 1944, he was a battle-tested 22-year-old squad leader with Company G, 3rd Battalion Airborne, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez, Jr.

CWO Risnes has many memories of those eventful war years. "I was the only member of Company G to go through the war without missing a day of combat," he remembers. He jumped into Normandy as well as Holland and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. During the early days of the Holland campaign he won a Silver Star.

CWO Risnes was working as a shipwright in a Tacoma, Wash., shipyard when he was drafted in 1942. "I volunteered for airborne duty when I got drafted because it was something new, and I wanted to try it out," he explains.

The new 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment was being formed by battalions at Camp Blanding, Fla., when the new recruit arrived. The regiment trained there, completed airborne training at Fort Benning, Ga., and went to Camp Mackall, N.C., for advanced field work. The regiment was deployed to the United Kingdom in preparation for the Normandy invasion.

So, CWO Risnes already had a combat jump under his belt on Sept. 17, 1944, when the planes carrying the 508th departed Langer and Fulbeck Airfields in England for Holland. The regiment exited the aircraft into the sky over the objective at about 1:30 p.m.



CWO RISNES REMEMBERS — Chief Warrant Officer Marvin L. Risnes holds a silk invasion map issued for the invasion of Normandy during World War II. In background is a photo of Ste. Mere Eglise the first French town liberated. CWO Risnes jumped into Normandy and Holland as a trooper in the 3rd Battalion Airborne, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was awarded a Silver Star during the Holland campaign. The veteran of 28 years in the Army recently rejoined the 82nd Airborne Division after his second tour of duty in Viet Nam.
(U. S. Army Photo by Sgt. Keith Lang)

"Our LZ (landing zone) was north of Groesbeek but we landed a few hundred yards off. We landed intact and moved on our objective in two or three hours. Our immediate target was the high ground around the towns of Bergendahl and Beek. They overlooked the area around Nijmegen," Risnes recalls.

"By late that afternoon we had worked up to 75 yards of the bridge at Nijmegen using mortars. The Germans had a couple of 88's around the bridge and it was tough going. If we had another hour or so I think we could have taken the bridge. But we had to be pulled back because the Germans had overrun our drop zone near Bergendahl and we were due for a resupply air drop there. We cleared the area and spent the night in Nijmegen."

For the next four days the fighting raged around Bergendahl and Beek. The Germans were desperate to regain the high ground and the 3rd Battalion's position was raked by systematic shelling and counterattacks in strength. Losses on both sides were heavy but the Germans were beaten back.

On Sept. 22 the battalion was ordered to attack and clear the Germans from the area to the east of Beek. The initial attempt that day met with little success. The following day the battalion, supported by tanks from the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry, moved out to a rendezvous near Polder. During the day Risnes was involved in the action which was to win him a Silver Star.

Early that morning Company G had moved forward flanked by two companies. Action on the flanks was light, but Company G ran into the center of German resistance and reached its objective, the small mill town of Thorenmsche Molen, after a fierce fight. The Germans immediately attacked and drove the company back about 800 yards. In the afternoon Company G moved forward again.

CWO Risnes remembers the action well: "The town was located on a dike

(Continued on page 24)

307th Engineer Medic Is NCO School Honor Graduate

82nd ABN DIV — A medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 307th Engineer Battalion, was first academically in the 39-man class of the 82nd Airborne Division Non-commissioned Officers (NCO) School at its graduation ceremony October 2.

The honor graduate, Specialist 4 Robert S. Welby, 23, of Troutdale, Ore., was the first to receive a diploma from the division commanding general, Major General George S. Blanchard. Next in line were the five distinguished graduates: Staff Sergeant Lyle G. Daniels of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion Airborne, 504th Infantry; Sergeant Carey L. Pennington, Company B, 2nd Battalion Airborne, 504th Infantry; Specialist 5 Johnny Lartigue, Company B, 782nd Maintenance Battalion; Sergeant John H. White, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion Airborne, 325th Infantry; and Sergeant Robert B. Nickerson, Jr., Company B, 82nd Signal Battalion.

Spec. 4 Welby, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Welby of Troutdale, entered the Army in July 1969 after attending the University of Oregon. He completed basic combat training at Fort Lewis, the basic medic course at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and jump school at Fort Benning, Ga., before being assigned to his present unit.

In his remarks to the graduates, Maj. Gen. Blanchard congratulated them on completing a "very tough, demanding course." He challenged them to return to their units and "take advantage of what you've learned here . . . I want you to take back the professionalism and expert training you have been exposed to here . . . It's tough to go back to your units and make an impact and it's going to take a lot of effort on your part."

The general charged the graduates of the four-week leadership course to "be professionals. We are counting on you to strengthen this division's readiness capability when you return to your units."

The division band and chorus entertained the graduates and guests at the ceremony in the ballroom of the 82nd NCO Open Mess.



HONOR GRAD — Specialist 4 Robert S. Welby, right, receives his diploma and the congratulations of Major General George S. Blanchard, division commander, after he was named honor graduate of the 82nd Airborne Division Non-commissioned (NCO) Officer School class of Oct. 2. Spec. 4 Welby, 23, of Troutdale, Ore., is a medic with Headquarters and Headquarters, 307th Engineer Battalion. (U. S. Army Photo by Spec. 4 Ted Painter)

CWO RISNES REMEMBERS . . .

(Continued from page 23)

along a canal and there was a small wooden bridge across the canal. I went across the bridge for recon purposes and took another guy with me. When we reached the other side he went to the left and I turned right.

"I walked right into the middle of a German platoon before I even knew it. They were dug in and I didn't see them. I got right in the middle of them when this German got up and threw one of those potato-masher grenades at me. I dove into a clump of corn shocks growing at the side of the road. We were at a stand-off. He would throw a grenade and I would duck.

"I started moving around the corn shocks to get a better shot at him when I felt a rifle brush against my back and shoulder. I whipped around and fired by reflex and hit this young German soldier in the arm. Evidently he had gotten scared and hid in the corn standing straight up, and I brushed against him when I started moving. He couldn't have been more than seventeen or eighteen years old.

"As soon as I fired I ran across the road and dove into the canal close to the bank. And the kid followed me! He had dropped his rifle when I hit him and evidently got excited and started running It just so happened that he ran the same way I did. When he came over the bank, I grabbed him and held his head under water until I saw that he wasn't going to put up a fight. Then, I let him up and took a couple of grenades off him."

The company attacked the town a third time on the following day before it was decided to abandon the tactically valueless position. The regiment remained in the area until Sept. 24. During those eight days the 3rd Battalion had attacked the Germans six times, had withstood five enemy attacks and had taken 146 prisoners and killed an estimated 100 enemy soldiers.

When the war ended, CWO Risnes, then a first sergeant, reenlisted. He was appointed a warrant officer in 1949 while at Fort Bragg with the division's Parachute Maintenance Company. In the last 20 years, his career has taken him to many parts of the world: 18-months in Korea, two three-year tours in Germany, two months in the Dominican Republic with the 82nd and two tours in Viet Nam.