

The Round Tablette

September 2006

Volume 15 Number 1

Published by WW II History Roundtable

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Welcome to the September meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War Two History Roundtable and our 20th year of programs. We are expecting this year to our best.

Tonight's program is about the 507th Parachute Infantry Division. We are pleased to have them on our program and hope that they enjoy the program as part of their reunion that is being held here in the Twin Cities.

2006 – 2007 Programs

September 14 507th PIR in Normandy

October 12 The Huertgen Forest

November 9 Relations between Germany and Japan

December 14 Battle of the Bulge, North Shoulder

January 11 Battle of Stalingrad

February 8 Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps

March 8 Marine Landings at Peleleu

April 12 Breaking the Japanese Codes

May 10 Battle of Midway

The Parachute Test Platoon

On June 26, 1940, action was taken to form a Parachute Test Platoon at Fort

Benning. Volunteers for this unit came from the 29th Infantry Regiment and were put on special duty status and attached to the infantry board. Because there was risk of serious injury or death, only unmarried men could join the Test Platoon. The Test Platoon was formed immediately thereafter, on July 1, 1940, and has the distinction of being the first such organization in the US Armed Forces.

The platoon was ready to make its first jump from an airplane after seven weeks of intensive training. As platoon leader, Lt. William T. Ryder was the first to jump, thus making history. The honor of being the first enlisted man to jump went to Private William "Red" King. A few days later, when the Test platoon made its first mass jump, the battle cry "Geronimo", made its first appearance. Private Aubrey Eberhardt yelled it so loudly when he jumped that observers on the ground heard him. Eberhardt shouted it to prove that he was not struck dumb with terror when he jumped from the plane. He said that he got the idea from a Western movie he had seen at the post theater the night before the jump.

Things went so well with the Parachute Test Platoon that the War Department authorized creation of a regular airborne unit. The 501st PIR was activated at Fort Benning on October 1, 1940. Selection and training, as well as the exceptional physical and mental toughness, set the paratroopers and glidermen as a breed apart. The American paratroopers came to be set apart from regular infantry by their hightopped jump boots and insignia, in addition to their distinctive combat uniforms. Early in 1941, the Department of Heraldry proposed a special qualification badge for those who finished jump training. The design that was proposed was

completely uninspiring. Lt. William P. Yarborough developed the design for jump wings that is still used today.

The 507th PIR was constituted on June 24, 1942 on the regular Army inactive list. It was activated on July 20, 1942 in the “Frying Pan” area of Fort Benning. As the 507th continued to fill with officers and men it began a 22 week training cycle to prepare the men for combat deployment. Training of parachute and glider troops in the early days of the Airborne was a continuous process. A constant search was made for closer teamwork in combined training, improved methods of fighting, weapons, vehicles and aircraft. Never before had men, weapons and equipment in the American Army been moved by air and entered combat from above the battlefield by vertical insertion.

The early paratroopers placed emphasis on physical training. The course at Parachute school began with a grueling week of physical development, obstacle courses and forced marches. Those volunteers who survived went on to spend a week in the packing sheds to learn rigging and how to fold and pack their reserve and main chutes. Next came jump training out of mock-ups and from jump towers. Live jumps came from C-47s where paratroopers learned to stand up, hook up, check their equipment and then stand in the door. At the “GO” signal they stepped out into space. After all of this difficult training, qualified paratroopers had a good reason to shout “Geronimo”.

More Reading On Tonight’s Topic:

Down To Earth

By Martin K. A. Martin
Schiffer Military History Pub.
Atglen, PA 2004

82nd Airborne In Normandy

By Dominique Francois
Schiffer Military History Pub.

Atglen, PA 2004
507th Parachute Infantry Regiment
By Dominique Francois
Heimdal Pub.
Bayeux, France 2000

All American; All The Way

By Phil Nordyke
Zenith Press
St. Paul, MN 2005

“I’m The 82nd Airborne Division

By Robert P. Anzuoni
Schiffer Military History
Atglen, PA 2005

On To Berlin

By James M. Gavin
Viking Press
New York, New York 1978

Geronimo

By William B. Breuer
St. Martin’s Press
New York, New York 1989

Twin Cities Civil War Roundtable
September 19

Admiral Dupont
Meeting at St. John’s University in
Collegeville
6:00 PM

St. Croix Valley Civil War Roundtable
September 25

Civil War Surgeons
Ray J’s Restaurant in Woodbury
Dinner 5:30 Program 7:00

See you next month!