



World War II and Korean War Experiences of SGM Horace Pearl

SGM Horace Pearl entered the Army at the age of 17 from the state of N.Y. He was in the 71st Infantry 44th Division until he was informed of a new unit that the Army was starting which was the Airborne. These men were to parachute behind enemy lines, which was more effective since the soldiers would be placed at strategic locations. SGM Pearl would have to give up his rank because they wanted everyone to be equal who volunteered for this elite group. On 6 July 1942 at Fort Benning, Ga. the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment was activated under the Airborne Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. During World War II, the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment participated in seven major campaigns and four regimental airborne assaults.

On 9 July 1943, just over a year after its activation SGM Pearl and the 505th made it's first regimental size combat parachute attack as part of Operation Husky 1. Under the leadership of Col. James Gavin their objective was to parachute behind enemy lines into an egg-shaped area around Gela, Sicily. They would then close off roads leading to the beaches and secure the drop zone for future use. Especially important near the drop zone was enemy-held Objective Y- a series of 16 concrete "pillboxes" from which German gunners controlled movement on nearby roads. However, Mother Nature did not cooperate. On July 9th Col. Gavin was informed that wind velocity in the landing area was 35 miles per hour but the invasion was under way and there was no turning back.. It was under these harrowing conditions that SGM Pearl and the 505th had it's first trial-by-fire. Only 15% of the combat team had been delivered to the correct Drop Zone. Nevertheless, small groups of lost Paratroopers cut every phone line they found which devastated the communications of the Axis forces. Ambushes were conducted and even Objective Y, the deadly pillboxes, were secured. The German Herman Goering Panzer Division was another matter. Even though outmanned and outgunned, SGM Pearl and the 505th used raw courage and fighting spirit to block the German tank division from advancing toward the Allied landings on the beachhead.

The largest combined military operation in history, "D-Day", found SGM Pearl and the 505th landing on the Normandy Peinsula. It was one of the first airborne units to hit the ground and liberated the first town in France, St. Mere-Eglise. The paratroopers jumped prior to the actual start of the invasion "H-Hour". Because of that tradition of being first into the fight the 505th regimental motto is "H-Minus". SGM Pearl recalls " As we parachuted into the town, the Germans were shooting at us...alot of men

parachuted onto tops of buildings, telephone poles, etc. The men were helpless as the Germans killed them. I landed outside of the town”.

Another event that SGM Pearl recalls: I was sent out on a reconnaissance patrol to determine what German units were on the other side of a river. Our battalion was to attack in the morning and our intelligence officer had informed us of a “Machine Gun Nest” (an outpost) somewhere on the other side of the river. This outpost had to be eliminated in order for the attack to go as planned. Two other patrols had gone out before me and without cover and concealment they crossed the bridge. Needless to say, with no cover and concealment they never came back. I decided that I would not cross the river on the bridge, but rather swim across it. I discovered the German outpost-this in the middle of the night- and we wiped out the outpost with grenades. We took papers and classified documents off the dead German soldiers to determine what unit they were and swam back. I didn't lose a man. The Battalion was able to attack in the morning. For that action SGM Pearl received the “Silver Star” for gallantry in action. Another event SGM Pearl recalls: “I had just met a young Lt. who had just come over two days earlier. I had been over for about 15 months. We were walking together and talking when we heard a “Mortar Round” coming in. We both dove for the ground but the round came in low and hard, so while in mid-air I was hit with shrapnel which spun me around onto my back.. I was wounded in the arm but my leg was severely injured. When I looked over at the Lt. he had caught the entire mortar round in his back. I guess it was the first time I experienced “shock”. I started calling for a medic, not for myself but for the Lt. not realizing he was already dead. There I was fighting for 15 months and the Lt. had only been over here for two days and he was dead. SGM Pearl was evacuated to a field hospital where the doctors considered amputation of his right leg as an option. The doctors were able to save the leg. He spent 3 months in the hospital and then was able to rejoin his unit.

On 17 September 1944, as part of “Operation Market Garden”, SGM Pearl made his fourth jump at Groesbeck, Holland, the largest airborne assault in history. During that fierce combat, Pearl as part of two lightly armed platoons at most 80 men, were surrounded by an entire German Infantry Battalion supported by tanks. The paratroopers fought off three savage German assaults and held their ground until relieved. SGM Pearl while in the 505th received two Presidential unit citations for his unit performance in D-Day and Operation Market Garden. The Presidential Unit Citation is the unit equivalent of the Medal Of Honor awarded to individual soldiers.

Later that winter SGM Pearl participated in the famous Battle of the Bulge. This battle as Hitler put it was going to be his Christmas present to his

people, which he said, would win the war for the Germans. SGM Pearl and the 505th stopped the German attacks cold, which marked the end of the war.

SGM Pearl also participated in the Korean Conflict as a member of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. It was in the Korean War that Horace Pearl made the last two of his six Combat Jumps in Pyong Yang, and Munsani, Korea. SGM Pearl recalls an event in Korea: We were sent on a rescue mission to rescue some captured American Soldiers. We had information that these soldiers were being held captive in a cave. We found the soldiers every one of them had their hands tied behind their backs and everyone of them were dead, with bullet to the back of the head. That part of Korea I'll never forget. As we took the personal belongings off our soldiers I saw pictures of their wives and children and some of these kids were just that.... Kids 17, 18, 19year old kids.

The 505th (which SGM Pearl served under) received Two Presidential Unit citations and three Foreign decorations for their valor in the seven major campaigns.

SGM Horace Pearl personally received the "Silver Star", "Two Bronze Stars", Four Purple Hearts, and made six combat jumps. The Six Jumps were as follows: Sicily, Salerno, Normandy, Holland, Pyong Yang, and Musani. Most importantly to his family and friends while in World War II, out of 248 men in his company SGM Pearl was one of three to come back alive.

SGM. Horace Pearl and his wife Dorothy have five children: Arlene, Lynn, Glenn, Gail, and Michael, Horace and Richard died in childhood. They also have 12 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. After a 23yr Army career they have been living in Griffin since July 1966. SGM Pearl accepted the job of starting the R.O.T.C. at Griffin High School. He and his wife retired from the school system in 1985.