

Enterprise writer gets to know grandfather through war research

By LeeAnna Tatum

Enterprise staff writer

My mother has in her possession a small leather pouch that her father carried through his time at war. What I know of my grandfather's war experience, I am learning from the contents of that pouch.

I never met my grandfather, Harry Maxwell Hudgins. He died a few years before I was born. He was a part of what we now refer to as the "greatest generation" - those men and women who stood tall against adversity and shaped a better world for those of us yet to come.

From the cold hard facts of his military record, a story unfolds. Harry was inducted into the Army on May 12, 1942, at Camp Blanding, Fla. His military occupational specialty was that of a cook. In 1944, he became part of a new breed of soldier - a paratrooper in the 506th Parachute Infantry.

At the beginning of my journey I knew only one fact, Harry was in the Headquarters Company 2nd Battalion 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Soon a whole world of information opened before me. Though I can't know what his own personal experience was, I began to gain an understanding of what it must have been like. Through the stories of others Harry's story is also told.

As a member of the 506th, Harry started his training at Camp Toccoa in North Georgia. The defining piece of the landscape was an outcropping called Currahee Mountain located within the confines of the camp. Currahee Mountain was an integral part of the training and ultimately the very identity of the men who were stationed there.

"Currahee" is derived from a Cherokee word meaning, "stand alone." The paratroopers of the 506th came to be called Cur-

rahees, it was their name, their motto, and their battle cry. As infantrymen specifically trained to be dropped behind enemy lines, they did indeed stand alone.

Currahee Mountain's steep incline beckoned upward, three miles up and three miles down - the soldiers were painfully aware of the distance as they ran the mountain trail during training exercises.

After their stint at Camp Toccoa, the 506th was ordered to Fort Benning, Ga., for the remainder of their training - jumps from an actual plane. But, Harry and the other men of his Battalion would not be transported to Ft. Benning by ordinary means. Their Commander had something far more challenging in store for them.

The Japanese army had recently established a new world record for the longest march completed by a military unit. The Commander of the 506th, Colonel Robert F. Sink thought his men could do better. Harry and the other men of the 2nd Battalion walked from Camp Toccoa to Atlanta, a total of 115 miles, over a three day period. The weather was cold and rainy during those December days.

Upon completion of their training, the men were sent to England to await their orders.

On March 23, 1944, the men of the 506th participated in a final dress rehearsal prior to entering combat. It was a paratrooper demonstration in Berks, England, performed for some very important observers: General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The 2nd Battalion participated in the jump while the 1st Battalion stood for inspection.

The following is a description of that event according to an unidentified newspa-



Pictured above is the pouch belonging to Harry Hudgins containing the items he carried with him during WWII.

per clipping from that time: "From a grandstand the Prime Minister and the generals watched splendidly executed parachute leaps. Many scores of aircraft swept down, and as they reached the saluting base a num-

ber of parachutists tumbled out."

The article continues: "Almost before the men from the first planes touched the ground

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