

MERCER MEMORIAL DAY 500 -2008 HONOREES-



JOHN BLANK, U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE, FIRST LIEUTENANT RETIRED. From early childhood John dreamed of flying. In 1942 on his 18th birthday he joined the Air Force. Wanting to be a fighter pilot he was rejected because he was too tall to fit safely into the cockpit. He was then assigned to be a pilot in the troop carrier command in Europe transporting paratroopers and airborne infantry to the fighting fronts. One of his missions was to drop soldiers behind enemy lines distracting the German army from the impending invasion of storming the beaches at Normandy. June 5, 1944 found him flying paratroopers over the Nazi held coastline. Flying low at 300' his plane became smattered with over 1500 bullet holes, one barely missing his foot by a mere inch. Yet, he fulfilled his mission and many others, delivering soldiers safely to their assigned missions, dropping paratroopers in Southern France, Germany and Italy. He remembers the Italian people waved instead of shooting at him!



RICHARD CRAIG, U.S. ARMY, COMPANY B, 3RD INFANTRY REGIMENT, OLD GUARD, RETIRED. Also called the Presidential Honor Guard, he was one of 55 highly trained men who were often referred to as the President's own troops. Stationed at Fort Myer, Arlington National Cemetery, Rich served his country from 1951 to 1953. The Guard was charged with forming a cordon around the perimeter of the President when arriving or departing National Airport, ready to fire if necessary to protect against any advancements. During these maneuvers the Secret Service escorts the President while the Honor Guard protects the Secret Service and the President. High points of his career in the military were delivering orders from the President to General Taylor, being his appointment to command the military forces in Korea; and being assigned to march in front of President Dwight D. Eisenhower during his inauguration parade. Rich believes we are all responsible for protecting the country's freedom, defending it and

continuing it as our forefathers scripted it-at all cost. He believes that his training provided him the satisfaction of knowing that he could be successful in life regardless of obstacles.



RALPH HUDSPETH, U.S. ARMY, STAFF SERGEANT, RETIRED. served with the 398th Anti-Tank Company, 100th Division, who were ordered to attack the Maginot Line, composed of miles of German-occupied steel and cement forts near Bitche, France. Ralph's platoon, the Blue Raiders, was to cross enemy lines and bring back German prisoners for interrogation. His platoon leader was killed in a mine field. The Platoon Leader who replaced him was hit by a sniper's bullet. Tech Sgt. Hudspeth became a 2nd Lieutenant when the position became his. He led his platoon with others reducing the forts and occupying the town. During the bitterly fought Heilbronn engagement he and his men crossed the fire-swept Neckar River in assault boats in the wake of intense evening shell fire; then moved his guns forward to thwart a German tank attack. The 100th Division was one of the longest on the firing line, in continual combat for six months. Because he provided optimum support to his battalion and put his own life at risk

he received a Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster. During the German occupation Ralph served as Defense Counsel on the Court Marshal Board. When you come to thank him during the Veterans Reception Memorial Day, remember to ask him about his 'miracle story', whom he found in France!



JAMES A. BAILEY, U.S. NAVY, 2ND CLASS AND U.S. ARMY, CW4, serving in both WW2 and Vietnam. Jim began his military career at age 17 aboard the U.S.S. Helena, a heavy Cruiser, part of the Pacific Fleet. After being discharged from the Navy he joined the Army serving 7 years as a paratrooper with the 11th, 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, and completing 84 jumps. He went on to flight school and graduated as a warrant officer pilot, choosing the helicopter for his military career. Jim and three of his brothers all achieved accreditation for solo flight, the most for any one family to achieve. He volunteered for three tours of duty in Vietnam, the last tour chosen over the safety of retirement. While commanding a helicopter he struck a tree during take-off, crashed into a river and drowned. He hadn't taken on the military as a job but as a life's passion. He died for a cause in which he strongly believed and thought was necessary. He wanted to be remembered as a pleasant person and did not want others to mourn

his passing, believing their obligation should be to the living. Jim's story reminds us that we sleep safely because others stand the watch.....

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