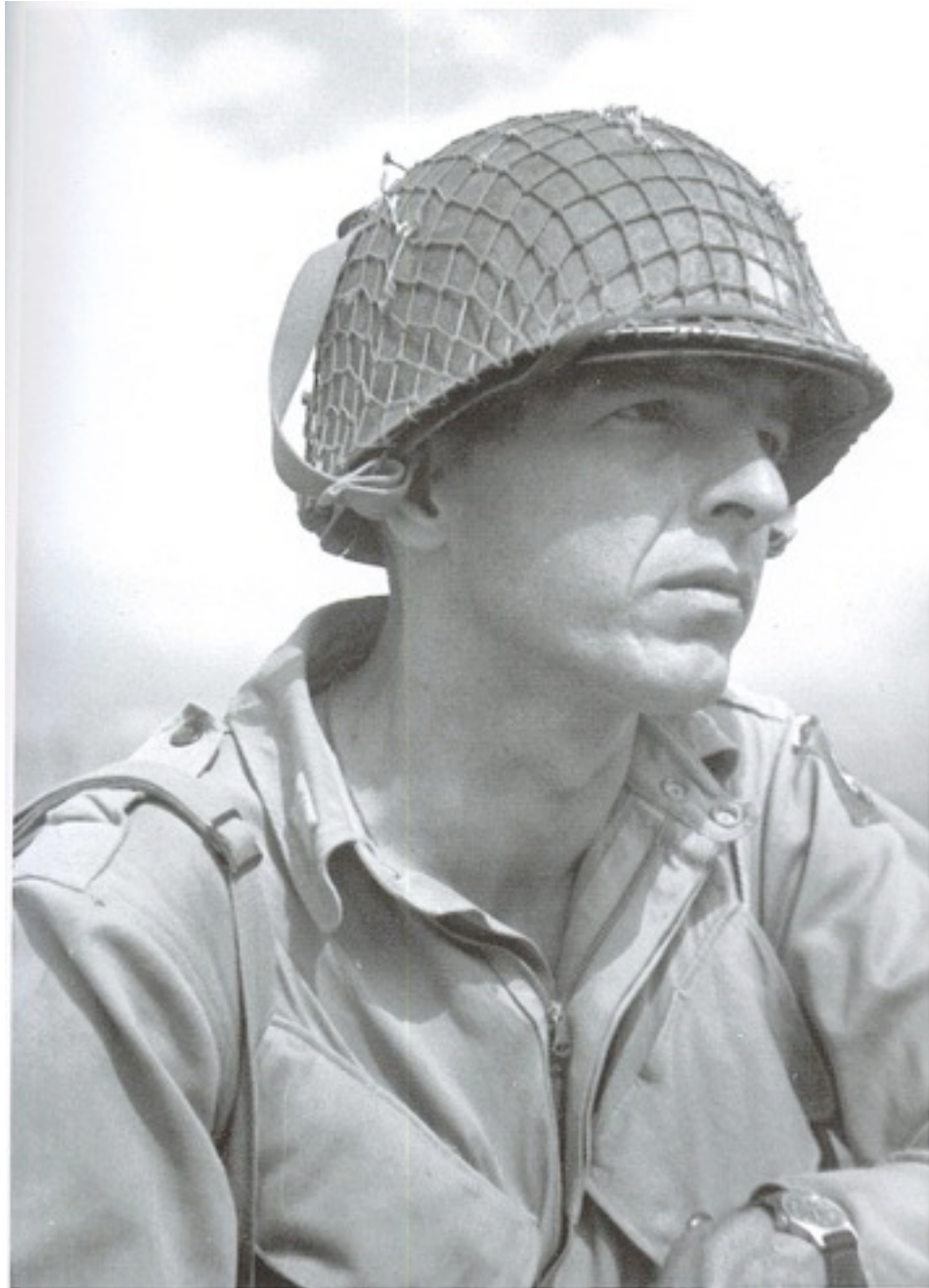


Ben Vandervoort, Paratrooper



“Outstanding Battle Commander Of World War II.”

The US Army's Center for Leadership, Command and General Staff College, was tasked in 1990 to name one “Outstanding Battle Commander” in each of America's wars, beginning with the Revolutionary War, The War of 1812, The Civil War, The War with Spain, World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

ROTC Cadet Beginnings

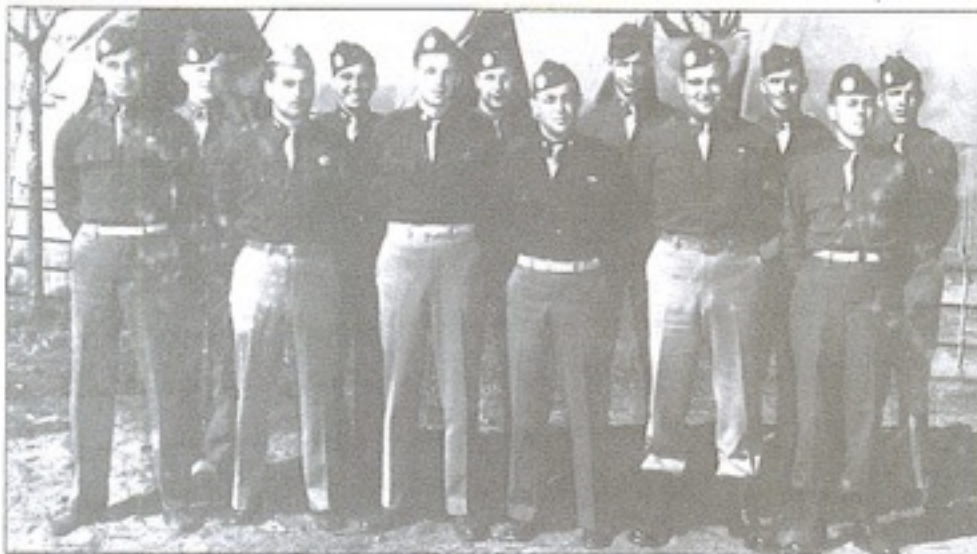
Benjamin H. Vandervoort, "Vandy" as he was familiarly known, was born March 3, 1915, of an Army family in Gosport, NY, a small town north of Buffalo, near the shore of Lake Ontario.

He attended Washington College in Chestertown, MD, and was awarded a BS degree in June 1938.

During his college career he had been enrolled in the Citizen Military Training Corps. Upon graduation he received a Reserve Officer Army Commission as a 2nd Lieutenant of Infantry.

He began active duty and was assigned to the 11th Infantry Regiment, based at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana, in 1938.

In August 1939 he entered a competition to transfer to the Regular Army, was successful, and was awarded a Regular Army Commission as 2nd Lieutenant that year.



PARACHUTE SCHOOL STAFF, 1942.

FRONT ROW: CPT RICHARD SEITZ, CPT MORRIS ANDERSON, MAJ WARD RYAN, BRIG GEN GEORGE HOWELL, MAJ JOHN NILAN, CPT ARTHUR RABER. BACK ROW: LT WALTER WOITODT, CPT BENJAMIN HOUSTON, 2/LT CLARENCE WEST, 2/LT BENJ MCLEAN, 1/LT JOHN LEARY, CPT BENJ VANDERVOORT

Benning in July 1940. Vandervoort joined this elite unit shortly after its first platoon of parachutists had already completed its initial jump trials.

As a Regular Army officer, he was assigned to the 10th Infantry Regiment, based at Fort Hayes, Ohio. There he served as a company commander and regimental staff officer.

Test Platoon

In summer 1940 the US Army issued the call for soldiers to volunteer for parachute and glider training. The Army's Test Platoon had been formed at Fort

501st Parachute Infantry Battalion (PIB)

As a parachute training officer, 2/LT Vandervoort helped activate America's first large airborne combat unit, the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion (PIB).

LT Vandervoort was assigned to duty with B Company of 501st PIB. His Company Commander was Captain Robert F. Sink.

On September 22, 1941,



Vandervoort's military ID card revealed his stats as 5'10" in height, 162 lbs weight, had brown hair and blue eyes. By this time he had been promoted to the rank of Captain.

The 501st PIB was commanded at this time by Major W. M. Miley. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Miley was ordered to Fort Benning to form and command a larger unit of airborne troops, the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR).

Earlier that year, in its first foreign service, the 501st PIB was ordered to deploy from Fort Benning to Panama to defend the Canal. While there in the Canal Zone, Vandervoort and LT Melvin Zais, in civilian attire due to the covert nature of their assignment, undertook a secret reconnaissance mission to scout suitable drop zones in Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala. Vandervoort returned to serve in Panama with the 501st PIB until June, 1942. Then he was ordered back to Fort Benning to join the cadre of an even larger airborne formation, the newly authorized 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), which was then commanded by Colonel James Gavin.

505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR)

505th PIR was activated at Fort Benning in July 1942 and later attached to the newly re-formed 82nd Airborne Division, which was initially under the command of MG Omar Bradley, and later under the command of MG Matthew Ridgeway.

82nd Infantry Division in 1917 Becomes 82nd Airborne Division in 1942

The Division had originally been created in 1917 as the 82nd Infantry Division. Its distinctive AA shoulder patch stood for “All American”, because it was the first division in the Army’s history to be constituted of soldiers from all 48 states. Prior to that time, divisions had been constituted by already formed state militia battalions and regiments, called up to Federal service.



Vandervoort was one of the first officers assigned to the 505th PIR and the first commanding officer of F Company in the 2nd Battalion. He trained other officers and men, as the regiment was moved to various Army posts -- Camp McCall, Camp Edwards, and Fort Bragg.

In April 1943 the 82nd Airborne Division was alerted to move out. Its regiments and support units entrained for New York City, the designated Port of Embarkation. There they boarded troop ships and set sail for Gibraltar, enroute to Casablanca and French Morocco in North Africa.

Vandervoort had made 46 jumps stateside, and had broken his left ankle on the last one. He was still recovering in the hospital when orders came down, so he quickly discharged himself from hospital and rejoined the 505th.

The Regiment disembarked at Casablanca then moved to encamp at Oujda. Vandervoort was promoted to Major, and Gavin named him Regimental S-3, the officer responsible for training and operations planning. Vandervoort immediately began the planning for Operation Husky, the upcoming summer 1943 invasion of Sicily. Most of the training was done at night, due to the brutal daytime heat of North Africa.

The training phase finally came to an end. Orders were issued for Operation Husky for July 9, 1943.

82nd Airborne’s First Combat Jump -- Sicily

That night, at 2315 hours, Vandervoort boarded his C-47 troop carrier plane with full combat load. A night combat drop had never been attempted by any army. As S-3, the regimental training and operations officer, and aide to Colonel Gavin, Major Vandervoort flew to Sicily in the lead plane of the air armada.

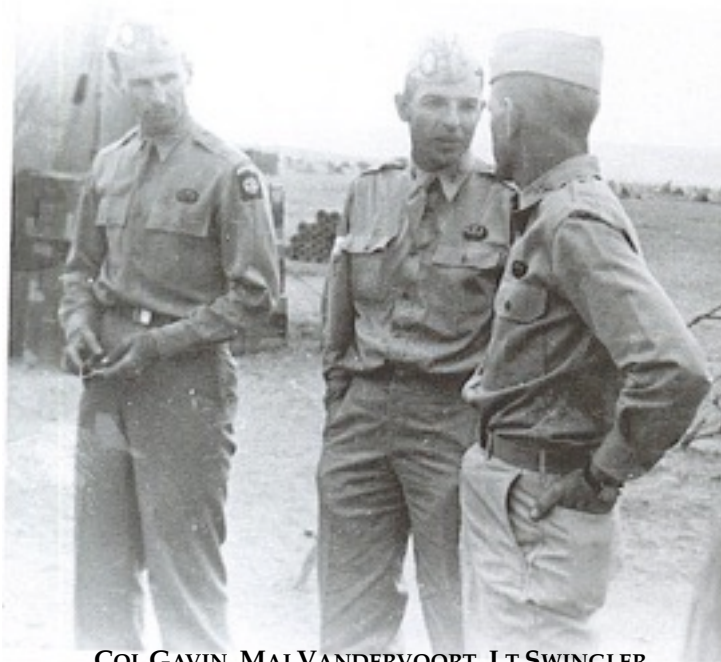


At about 0130 hours, Vandervoort and his fellow paratroopers hit the silk over Sicily. Their mission was to harass, disrupt and destroy the enemy and his communications behind the beaches at Gela. The idea was to impede any German or Italian counterattack during the vulnerable landing phase of the invasion while the seaborne soldiers were in landing craft or wading ashore.

The night of the drop, 35 mph winds blew across Sicily beaches and inland. Normal safety procedures for training were to cancel jumps when winds exceeded 15 mph.

During combat operations, safety restrictions were modified and jumps were not cancelled. Due to high winds across Sicily, as well as to navigational errors, the paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne were widely scattered over Sicily.

Vandervoort's stick of paratroopers, including Colonel Gavin, were dropped 30 miles from their designated drop zones. On landing they were only able to gather up 8 other paratroopers, but marched toward the sound of the guns. Marching all night, they eventually ran into an Italian patrol at mid-morning. After a brief but fierce firefight, the enemy patrol was routed.



COL GAVIN, MAJ VANDERVOORT, LT SWINGLER

IN NORTH AFRICA

Sicily was declared secured in Allied hands by August 16, 1943. Vandervoort and his men returned to base at Kairouan, North Africa. There the regiment re-equipped, and took on replacements from stateside. Thus refitted, the 505th PIR returned to Sicily at Casteletrano. There they began preparations for an anticipated airborne assault on mainland Italy. They were alerted for a jump into Rome, but this was aborted at the last minute on orders from Eisenhower and Mark Clark.

Second Combat Jump -- Italy

On September 4, 1943, the 505th PIR jumped into Paestum, Italy, in support of the seaborne invasion of nearby Salerno. In this battle, Vandervoort led 2nd Battalion as its commanding officer. As the Italian campaign eventually moved northward from the initial beachheads at Salerno, most of the 82nd Airborne Division were brought out of the Italian campaign. They redeployed to England to begin planning and training for the long awaited cross channel invasion of France.

From November 18 to December 9, the 505th PIR was on the high seas toward the United Kingdom. They disembarked in Belfast, Northern Ireland and set up temporary camp in Cookstown. Two months later they moved again, sailing across the Irish Sea, heading for their more permanent British staging base at Quorn, England.

On June 1, 1944 2nd Battalion and the rest of the 505th PIR headed for their marshaling airfields, where parachutes, combat gear, ammunition and rations were waiting. From then on, they awaited orders to commence Operation Overlord, the cross channel invasion.



Promoted to LtCol

On June 2nd, Vandervoort, age 29, was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. On June 5th, he and 2nd Battalion boarded aircraft. They were bound for Normandy, to drop behind Utah beach and protect it from German counterattack until the beachheads were secure, and the infantry and tanks were safely moving inland.

Third Combat Jump - Normandy

Once again Ben Vandervoort, in command of 2nd Battalion, flew in the lead plane with troopers of 505th PIR of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Suddenly and without warning, long before crossing their designated checkpoint near Merederet River, the pilot prematurely turned

on the green light to jump. Since this was the lead plane, if its jumpmaster were to exit the aircraft the entire following serial would also jump. The overhead outboard green light enclosed in plexiglass outside the lead plane would pass the GO signal back to all planes in the long column of C-47's. All would be misdropped.



Vandervoort was jumpmaster and kept a level head. Leaning far out of the open door of his C-47, way too much altitude for a combat jump, checking off key terrain features, Vandervoort could identify where they were in relation to their target drop zones. He quickly countermanded the "jump" signal and ordered the pilot to turn off the green GO light. A few minutes later, Vandervoort spotted the T-shaped blue lights which the pathfinders had set up after their earlier jump, to mark the correct drop zone.

The pilot neither slowed the aircraft nor dropped to the 750 foot altitude in the jump orders. Once again the green GO light came on, and Vandervoort was first out the door. He knew they were on their designated drop zone. He later said that, due to excessive air speed, the opening shock of his canopy deploying “popped his eyeballs.” Jumping at excessive air speed caused his field glasses, musette bag, and map cases to vanish in the slip stream of the C-47 engines.



The Longest Day

Unlike many paratroopers, 2nd Battalion 505th PIR all landed successfully on or very near their designated drop zones. 2nd Battalion’s mission was to block enemy attempts to move against the key road junctions in the town of Ste. Mere Eglise from the north. 2/505 was in position to do exactly that.

Breaks A Leg on the Jump

Vandervoort broke his ankle on this jump into Normandy, when he landed heavily in a French apple orchard about one quarter mile from his designated drop zone. He improvised a crutch and made his way to the rally point. Along the way he fortuitously spotted two paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division, separated from their unit, pulling a German ammunition cart.

As the story goes, when Vandervoort sought to commandeer their cart to ease off walking on his broken leg, the Screaming Eagles balked. “We didn’t come to Normandy to ride some Colonel around on a cart,” they complained. Vandervoort persuaded them otherwise.

Refuses Medical Evacuation

Even days later he still refused to leave his command to seek medical treatment. He led his Battalion into battle on the cart, maintaining his balance with an improvised cane. He laced his boot as tight as he could and ignored the pain. On D-Day +2

he finally consented to have a steel brace placed on his boot, and a rough plaster walking cast put over everything. This so-called walking cast was replaced eight times because of rain and water in the foxholes into which he occasionally dove for shelter.



Photo Courtesy: Leslie Palmer Cruise, Jr

Taking Ste Mere Eglise

Eventually his men secured Ste. Mere Eglise and set up a perimeter defense in preparation for the inevitable counterattack. The lightly armed paratroopers



*JOHN WAYNE PORTRAYS BEN VANDERVOORT IN THE
1961 MOVIE, "THE LONGEST DAY."*

w e r e
discussing
how best to
hold off what
they fully
expected was
coming, and
what they
w e r e
explicitly
there to
prevent - a
P a n z e r
counterattack
on the flank
of the Utah
b e a c h
landings.

Among the Infantrymen suddenly appeared a US Navy liaison officer. He was a gunnery officer and quickly contacted a destroyer of the Royal Navy lying

off Utah beach. However, the British ship had no maps of the Ste. Mere Eglise area, and so their guns could not be brought to bear. The liaison officer gave up on his brief efforts to call in naval gunfire in support of the paratroopers, and shut down his radio.

Vandervoort thought otherwise. He could see a large Panzer formation a few miles to their north, forming for the attack. According to the story, Vandervoort told the hapless sailor something to the effect, "See those German tanks to the north? You and we have approximately five more minutes on this earth unless we can bring the Navy's big guns into play." It was no exaggeration. The now highly motivated young naval officer got back on his radio.

This time he got through to a US Navy destroyer, which in turn patched him through to the big battle wagon, USS Nevada, lying further off Utah beach. (The Nevada had been severely damaged and beached along 'battle ship row' during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7th. She had since been re-floated and refitted, in time to support the D-Day invasion.)

USS Nevada's huge guns, 16-inch in width with rifled barrels, hurled enormous projectiles over 20 miles with very high velocity and deadly accuracy.

US Navy Comes Through With Heavy Artillery for the Army



Battleship USS Nevada - Re-floated after Pearl Harbor Sinking

By this time the Panzers were lumbering down the road. Almost immediately the fearsome rumble of the incoming 16" naval ordnance could be heard, like freight trains hurtling overhead. The first rounds landed only one field over from the Panzers. Vandervoort radioed the big battle ship, "Fire for effect." An awesome broadside erupted from USS Nevada: ten 16" guns, and twenty-seven 5" guns. The Panzer formation was utterly decimated.

The German infantry came on, however. Even without their tank support, the Panzergrenadiers had 4 to 1 superiority in numbers over the American paratroopers. They pushed the attack relentlessly, in a desperate effort to disrupt the landings on Utah Beach.

The paratroopers, their ammunition nearly all expended, were slowly forced back toward the town. Their slow and orderly retreat became a moving roadblock. The paratroopers held Ste. Mere Eglise until relieved by American tanks and infantry pushing inland from Utah Beach.

A week later, on D+10, 2nd Battalion of the 505th PIR, fighting from hedgerow to hedgerow, crossed the Merederet River and seized the town of Ste. Sauveur-le-Vicomte. On D+25 with 2nd Battalion still leading the attack, crossed the creek line at Varenguebec, and seized good positions at Dupinerie Ridge.

LtCol Vandervoort took over fire direction from the naval officer at this point. "Can you see the church steeple in Ste. Mere Eglise?" he queried.

"We have it visually," replied the Nevada's gunnery officer. "And the road leading from it northward?" "Yes, we have the road visually," came the response. Vandervoort then directed the gunnery.

"Fire three miles north from that church steeple, on that road. I will observe and correct your fire."



Church in Ste Mere Eglise, Normandy

Awarded His First Distinguished Service Cross

For his courageous leadership and determination in Normandy, Vandervoort was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, pinned on him personally by General Omar Bradley. Part of the citation for this decoration reads, “With



complete disregard for his own safety he continually moved about the foremost elements subjecting himself to intense enemy rifle, machine gun and artillery fire.” This description of Vandervoort’s “leading from the front” became a trademark of his leadership style for the rest of the war.

The 82nd Airborne Division was pulled off the line in Normandy after nearly 40 days of straight combat, far longer than light airborne infantry is expected to be committed.

The depleted paratrooper formations returned to England

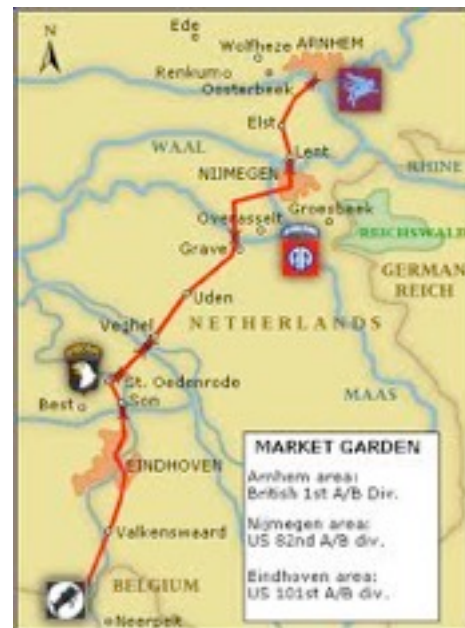
on July 19, 1944. Vandervoort’s 2nd Battalion of the 505th PIR was located in the Nottingham-Leicester-Market Harborough area, where it re-equipped, and took on replacements from stateside. Recuperating quickly, the Regiment began readying itself for the largest airborne operation in history.

Montgomery’s “Bridge Too Far” Plan

Operation Market-Garden was Field Marshall Montgomery’s audacious plan for airborne troops to be dropped 35 miles behind German lines in Holland, to seize a series of highways and bridges, culminating in capturing the final bridge at Arnhem, across Germany’s historic defensive moat, the Rhine River.

Across this corridor of seized highways and bridges, Montgomery’s XXX Corps of Sherman tank formations was to race for the prize at Arnhem. Such an armored thrust into the Ruhr valley, Germany’s industrial heartland, was expected to force the war in Europe to a hasty conclusion.

On September 17, 1944, Vandervoort’s 2nd Battalion as part of the 82nd Airborne Division, along with the US 101st Airborne Division, and the British 1st Airborne Army, with the Polish Parachute Brigade attached, boarded the largest ever armada of C-47 aircraft and gliders, and set off for Holland. The 82nd’s objective was to seize key bridges in and around the Dutch city of Nijmegen.



Fourth Combat Jump

The daylight landings in Holland were textbook accurate for both American airborne divisions. In the 82nd Airborne's sector of operations around Nijmegen two parachute regiments, the 505th and 504th were ordered to seize two large bridges over the Waal River (one a railway bridge, the other a highway bridge). These were the last bridges along the corridor until Arnhem, where the final bridge across the Rhine, was sited, (the so-called "Bridge Too Far" of Cornelius Ryan's



Vandervoort leads 2/505 into Groesbeck, Holland.

b o o k) , leading into the heart of the Third Reich. It was at Arnhem that the British 1st Airborne Army (the famous "Red Devils") were in the fight of their lives.

The daylight drop into Nijmegen was a model airborne operation, with moderate winds, clear weather, and light enemy response initially, due the the achievement of tactical surprise.

Seizing a Bridge from Both Sides

Vandervoort's 2nd Battalion was assigned the mission of capturing Nijmegen and securing the southern approaches to the vital bridges.

This attack moved off at 1445 hours. The enemy, initially taken by surprise, recovered quickly and put up a spirited defense, with their backs to the Fatherland across the Waal.

By 1900 hours all elements were in close contact with the enemy. Firefights and close combat in the Nazi foxholes, involving knives and bayonets, lasted throughout the night. By dawn the battle was stalemated, with the enemy still hanging on.

At 0530 the next day, July 20th, the battalion began a direct assault from all sides. Simultaneously, in a coordinated attack, the 504th PIR spearheaded its legendary daylight river crossing of the Waal. They rowed in light canvas boats, paddling with rifle butts under direct fire from the hostile shore.

Daylight Crossing Under Direct Fire in Flimsy Boats

Fighting hard with every available weapon, the All Americans of the 82nd



Airborne closed with the German. Many Nazis chose to die in their foxholes rather than surrender. They continued the fight even when their situation appeared hopeless. Both bridges were secured and held for the arriving British.

Tragically, and inexplicably to the Americans, the tank divisions of British

XXX Corps, once safely across the bridge, declined to continue the attack to relieve their brethren Red Devils, a scant 8 miles distance from Nijmegen bridge. Those gallant British paratroopers were surrounded and cut to pieces by SS Panzers at Arnhem.

Vandervoort's 2nd Battalion had suffered 82 casualties, including those killed and wounded. It inflicted 115 enemy killed, hundreds wounded, and captured another few hundred. For his actions in Holland, Vandervoort was awarded his second Distinguished Service Cross.

2nd Battalion and the rest of 505th PIR remained in defensive positions for three more weeks in Holland before being ordered into strategic reserve at Suippes, France. Winter came early that year. In Suippes, they refitted, recuperated, and took on replacements to replenish their losses.

***BRITISH XXX CORPS IN SHERMAN TANKS ON
NIJMEGAN BRIDGE, ONLY 8 MILES FROM ARNHEM
BRIDGE, THE INFAMOUS "BRIDGE TOO FAR"***



Panzers Breakthrough in the Ardennes

Their well-earned respite was short lived. In the pre-dawn hours of 16 December, three Panzer armies, achieving complete strategic and tactical surprise, came rumbling out of the snowy mists of the “impassable” Ardennes Forest. They assaulted lightly-held Allied positions. The surprise and breakthrough were ominous.

The American airborne divisions being held in strategic reserve were alerted to move up to the breakthrough points near a town in Belgium called Bastogne, to plug holes in the line, and thwart the Panzer advance by denying them the crossroads city.



Within 24-hours of receiving notice the 82nd Airborne packed up and moved by truck to the battle area. Sixteen hours later they were in defensive positions in the vicinity of the town of Trois Ponts, with orders to prevent the Panzers from crossing these three key bridges.

Throughout the brutal winter campaign, 2nd Battalion was called upon to clear pockets of enemy resistance, fighting elements of the 1st SS Panzer Division. On Dec 21st, Vandervoort received a bullet wound in his right shoulder, from a Schmeisser machine pistol. Despite his wound and the bitter cold, and as he had done in Normandy, he refused medical evacuation, and stayed with his men in the fight around Trois Ponts, directing his men, always leading from the front.



The Panzer advance was halted, and the Allies gradually went over to the attack, grinding down enemy resistance to eliminate the “bulge” in the line, for which this greatest land battle has been named.

Battle of the Bulge

In the early morning hours of January 6-7, 1945, while leading his Battalion in an assault in the small town of Garonne, Ben Vandervoort's incredible luck ran out. We are fortunate to have the after action report of one of Vandervoort's



company commanders, to recount in detail exactly what transpired. His report reads, in part:

"On the morning of Jan 7th I sent the runners to make certain both platoon leaders were awake. At the appointed time company headquarters and the 1st platoon

saddled up and moved to the 2nd platoon's position.

I crossed the LD on time with the 1st platoon. We advanced under cover of darkness over open snow covered fields for several hundred yards. Patrols checked out the edge of the wood line and reported the area was clear of enemy. We moved into a heavily wooded cultivated pine forest with aligned trees tightly spaced in rows that ran at a tangent to our direction of advance. The darkness and the tree alignment made it extremely difficult to maintain an accurate compass heading through the dense woods. I abandoned the use of the compass in favor of moving uphill toward the high ground that was our destination.

As we advanced uphill we came upon a firebreak where I found German communication wire and I followed the wire uphill some five or six hundred yards. As we neared the top of the hill we left the cultivated forest and entered a naturally wooded area. The point signaled a halt and a messenger returned to tell me the point heard sounds of men snoring. I joined the point, only a few yards ahead and listened. I could hear men snoring to our front, flanks and left rear.



LT COL VANDERVOORT IN BELGIUM,
WINTER 1944

Using the men on the point we organized two teams, one to work each side of the firebreak. The teams went from foxhole to foxhole awakening the sleeping German soldiers, disarming them and bringing them to the column where we passed them to the rear. It was slow work but all was going well. We had disarmed about six or eight prisoners in this manner when a shot rang out at the rear of the column. One of our men was about half asleep on his feet. He looked up, saw a German POW and in his confusion shot him. All hell broke loose.

We came under heavy small arms fire from what appeared to me to be all directions. We managed to form what amounted to an elongated perimeter. The Germans to our rear must have panicked for they withdrew, permitting the 2nd platoon under 1st Sgt. Rogers to join us as first light broke.

With Rogers on the left and Price on the right, we pressed forward clearing the area of enemy until we reached a second firebreak that ran at right angles to our direction of attack.

At this firebreak we came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire and the fires of supporting mortars and artillery. Both Rogers and Price reported they were pinned down at the edge of the firebreak, a few yards from the defenders. I was only ten or twenty yards to their rear. By inspection I was able to determine I was on my objective. The topographical crest lay only a few yards beyond the German position to our front.

A lieutenant from the division anti-tank battalion crawled up to me and reported he had a 57mm anti-tank gun and crew with him. He reported his crew had attacked and destroyed a German machine gun to our rear on the way to our position. I was

unable to reach the battalion on my radio so the anti-tank officer filled me in on the situation. He reported the battalion was held up in the valley by German infantry supported by two monster Tiger tanks. If we could seize the crest of the hill he might be able to get a shot into the rear of one or both of the tanks.

"I'll flank them with the battalion staff."

While all this was going on, we continued to exchange fires with the defenders at very close range. The anti-tank officer returned to his crew and minutes later I saw the slim figure of my battalion commander, Ben Vandervoort, crawling up the firebreak to my position. I briefed him on the situation and I informed him I could muster a reserve force of about ten men from my company headquarters, a mortar squad and the anti-tank crew. He said he had about six men (I assumed his driver, staff, and security) with him. LtCol. Vandervoort said 'Give me about 5 minutes to get in position, then you make a frontal assault with your platoon and company headquarters. I'll flank them with the battalion staff. We carried out the assault as Vandervoort ordered. We overran the position and received heavy mortar fire. I saw an orange flash about five yards to my front. The anti-tank officer threw his hand to his forehead and said, 'Joe, I'm hit.' He was dead when he hit the ground. Harris was on the ground behind me, severely wounded in both legs; I stood there feeling my body to see if I was still in one piece. Except for a multitude of tiny needle fragments that sprayed my exposed face and hands, I was unharmed. A messenger arrived within minutes to tell me Vandervoort was wounded.

I assume the same volley of fire that killed the anti-tank officer had hit him. By the time I reorganized the company to protect against a possible counterattack, Vandervoort was gone and I later learned he lost an eye. During my thirty years of service, I hope I

was able to instill in the young troopers who served under me some of the outstanding traits of character and leadership I observed in LtCol Vandervoort. He was a true warrior."

Finally, A Career-ending Wound

During the attack described so vividly in this eyewitness account, a shell from an 80mm mortar exploded near Vandervoort. A white hot jagged shell fragment tore into his face, penetrating his left frontal sinus and ridge, destroying his left eye.

World War II was over for Ben Vandervoort. He was evacuated to the 15th General Hospital in Liege, Belgium, then eventually stateside to more hospitals. His wound was too grievous to permit continued military service, by the Army's standards of that era. He was medically discharged. He retired from the Army in 1946, a full Colonel



“Best Battlefield Commander”

Many veterans heard General Gavin express his view that he considered Ben Vandervoort his best battalion commander in the 82nd Airborne Division. It was widely understood that General Ridgway agreed with General Gavin’s assessment.

BRONZE
STAR
MEDAL



PURPLE HEART WITH TWO
OAK LEAF CLUSTERS



NETHERLANDS
BRONZE LION



FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE
CROSS WITH OAK LEAF
CLUSTERS

81

In 1990 the Army tasked its Command and General Staff College to select, from each of America’s wars, beginning with the Revolutionary War, through the War of 1812, the Mexican War, our Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam, one outstanding combat leader from each.

The Center for Army Leadership, Army Command and General Staff College chose Colonel Ben Vandervoort. He was officially designated “The Outstanding Battle Commander of World War II.”

CIA Service

After his Army retirement, and recuperation from battle wounds, Vandervoort was invited to join the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency in 1947. He accepted the call, and proceeded to render 20 more years of service to his country, in Washington, and in overseas assignments.

Ben Vandervoort had married Nedra Marlin, an Army nurse on December 24, 1940. They raised two children. Ben Jr. was born in 1943 and a daughter, Marlin arrived in 1946. The Vandervoorts eventually retired to Hilton Head Island, in South Carolina in 1967.



In November 1990, at age 75, Ben Vandervoort tripped and fell down a flight of stairs at his Hilton Head home. The injuries proved fatal.

Ben Vandervoort lies at rest in Beaufort, National Cemetery His beloved Nedra

lies buried close by. They are buried within a few feet of the gravesite of another All American, General Reuben Tucker. Vandervoort greatly admired Tucker, and requested to be buried alongside his friend and comrade-in-arms.

Reuben Tucker and 504th PIR

Colonel Tucker had commanded another regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, the 504th PIR, (the legendary "Devils in Baggy Pants").

It was Tucker's 504th PIR which had seized Nijmegen Bridge from the far side, in a daylight river crossing in flimsy boats, under direct fire, as Vandervoort's 2nd Battalion of the 505th PIR assaulted from the near side, directly into German 88s, in that long ago summer of 1944 in Holland.



MG Reuben Tucker

Hollywood Picks John Wayne to Play Vandy

In 1961, Cornelius Ryan told the D-Day story in his epic book, "The Longest Day." It was later made into an equally epic movie by 20th Century Fox, directed by



Darryl Zanuck. It featured a huge cast of all the Hollywood notables of that day.

The starring role went to John Wayne, who portrayed Ben Vandervoort pictured above in scenes from the Normandy battles.

Savannah-Hilton Head Chapter Becomes Ben Vandervoort Chapter.

In 2007, our chapter of the 82nd Airborne Division Association, voted to change our name. The Chapter was a new one in the Association, having only received its Charter two years previously. The choice of Ben Vandervoort to be the chapter's namesake came easily. He had spent his retirement years on Hilton Head Island, and had specifically requested to be buried in Beaufort National



**VANDERVOORT GRANDSON RICHARD
"MOOSE" AND DAUGHTER MARLIN.**

Cemetery. We contacted surviving members of Ben Vandervoort's family. With the approval of Ben Vandervoort's daughter Marlin, and his grandson Richard, we then got name change approval from the National Association, and became The Ben Vandervoort Chapter. We proudly had it sewn on our shirts.



Memorial Day Dedication

Our announcement of the name change was timed to coincide with Memorial Day 2007. The annual parade in the town of Beaufort followed its traditional 3 mile route along the streets of Beaufort's historic district. The parade ended where it had begun, at the National Cemetery that had been authorized by President Lincoln in 1864. A hallowed ground born in sacrifice, and steeped in tradition.

Beaufort is a town that appreciates its military. It has long been the home of Parris Island Marine Recruit Depot, Beaufort Marine Corps Air Station, and the big Beaufort Naval hospital. Beaufort is not used to an Army presence, much less the presence of the famed 82nd Airborne Division.



Vandy's Boys

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**From
Yesterday to
Today,
Across the
Generations**

When the 2007 Memorial Day Parade stepped off, our chapter marched proudly behind a color guard sent down from Fort Bragg especially for this event. The All American troopers of the Color Guard were members of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Ben Vandervoort's old regiment, but of today's generation.



The parade wound its way back to the National Cemetery. Spectators and marchers assembled for the memorial remembrance of fallen warriors who had given “the last full measure of devotion.”

We gathered at the Vandervoorts’ gravesites for our own ceremony of remembrance. Our own chapter members included World War II paratrooper veterans James Sapp and Joe Rheinberger. In addition to our own local chapter veterans, others who had

known “Vandy” came from distant places to honor his memory.



James Sapp who served with Tucker in 504th PIR from Sicily to Italy to Holland to the Bulge



**ABOVE: DON LASSEN REMEMBERS VANDY
LEFT: MOOSE WITH 2/505 VETS - DON LASSEN AND SPENCER WURST;**



**COLOR GUARD FROM
TODAY’S 2/505 LEADS US
VETERANS IN THE BEAUFORT
PARADE.**

**AIRBORNE TROOPERS
ACROSS THE GENERATIONS.
THE BOND OF BROTHERHOOD
IS NEVER BROKEN.**



Notable Guests -- Who's Who of the Airborne

Barbara Gavin Fauntleroy (General Gavin's daughter) and her husband, Clancy were on hand. Other visitors come to pay respects included Don Lassen, Editor and Publisher of Static Line; airborne authors Spencer and Gayle Wurst; Richard Young and Rich Becker, President and Chaplain respectively, of the 505th PIR Panther Association.



FRONT ROW: CLANCY AND BARBARA (GAVIN) FAUNTLEROY; JOE AND MARY ANN RHEINBERGER (JOE SERVED UNDER GAVIN IN THE 82ND AIRBORNE IN WORLD WAR II.

Most notable of all were Vandervoort family members: daughter Marlin, and grandson Richard.

The 505th PIR veterans spoke movingly of their wartime experiences serving with Vandy. Several, like Vandy himself, had started out with the invasion of Sicily, fought in Italy, then D-Day and the jump into Normandy, then Holland and the taking of Nijmegen Bridge, then Belgium and the Battle of the Bulge.



The stories told by these veterans had us laughing, gave us lumps in the throat, and had us nearly bursting with pride.

LEFT:

RICHARD "MOOSE" VANDERVOORT, VANDY'S GRANDSON, AND HIS DAUGHTER MARLIN, STANDING AT THE GRAVE SITES OF THEIR PARENTS.

82nd Airborne Division Association

Ben Vandervoort All Airborne Chapter

Savannah-Hilton Head-Beaufort



2011 Chapter Officers

Chairman - Jim Andrews

Vice Chairman - Rusty Coleman

Secretary - Dennis Conlon

Treasurer - Jim Andrews

Recording Secretary - Bill Creighton

Sergeant-at-Arms - Gene Clark

Trustee - Bill Acebes

Trustee - Jerry Devlin

Trustee - Lou Nunziata

Trustee - Maurice Tubin

Trustee - Mike Williams

*Past Chairman and Chapter Founder
- Bill Eberle*

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