

# NATHANIEL RAMSEY HOSKOT

(508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne)

1911 – 2004

Nathaniel R. (“Nat”) Hoskot was born in Dayton, Ohio on September 10, 1911 and was raised in Boise, Idaho. Interested in the military from an early age, he enrolled in JROTC at Boise High School in 1925 and as a member was honored to guard the “Spirit of St Louis” with a wooden gun during its overnight stop in Boise on Charles Lindbergh’s 1927 USA tour celebrating his historic transatlantic flight.



Hoskot in college.

He continued his interest in military service by joining the National Society of Pershing Rifles (Company B, 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment) upon enrolling at the University of California, Berkeley, and was a Lieutenant Colonel in the University Cadets by the time he finished college in May, 1933. Upon graduation he received an appointment of Second Lieutenant of Infantry in the Army of the United States which detailed that “he will enter upon active duty under this commission only when specifically ordered to work such active duty by competent authority.” In 1935 he married Cal classmate Ellenor (“Peggy”) Knupp in Los Angeles, and worked in various oil company jobs throughout the San Joaquin Valley for the next seven years, all the while maintaining his membership in the Army Reserve.

In 1940 he volunteered to become a Reserve Officer in the U.S. Army, and on August 1 was assigned to Co B, 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division at Camp Ord (2 weeks later re-designated Fort Ord) in Monterey, California. The next three years included many moves for different training assignments, including a 1942 sailing to Scotland for Commando Training followed by Street Fighting School in London, Amphibious trainings in Camp Edwards, Massachusetts and Carrabelle, Florida, and Parachute Training at Ft Benning, Georgia in April, 1943, after which he was assigned to the 508<sup>th</sup> PIR at Camp Mackall in North Carolina. When the 2nd Airborne Brigade was formed that summer, Nat became the S-3 (Operations) on the Brigade HQ staff. Trainings and maneuvers were conducted throughout the fall of 1943. Commissioned a Lt Col on 11/3/1943, he set sail with the Brigade for Ireland and the E.T.O. one month later. They thought they would be there for 7 or 8 months, but in February, 1944 the Brigade was moved to Nottingham, England and joined with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, training and planning for the Invasion.



Nat & Peggy



508th Parachute Infantry  
Regiment

Three weeks before D-Day, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Brigade was disbursed, with all of its paratroopers going to various other units. As the Brigade's S-3, Nat was effectively out of a job, but he was anxious to participate in the Invasion. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, commander of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and a friend from their shared 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne days, suggested he take a group of 10-12 of his 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Headquarters



82nd Airborne Division

soldiers and the division's communications equipment – recording machines, radios, the “heavy stuff” - in on D-Day, acting as a liaison between the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions.



Hoskot (on left) on 4 June 1944

Nat's plane took off from RAF Welford shortly after midnight on June 6, and “flew around” the countryside for some time before all the planes were in the air and could fly across the channel in some sort of formation. Nat said that watching these planes out of a slit in his plane was one of the most amazing sights in his life. Unfortunately, as with so many, his plane went off-course due to the weather, and when the pilot realized he was too far south of their intended Drop Zone C, he started to turn the plane around to go north at which

point it was hit by anti-aircraft fire. When it was hit a second time, the pilot punched the green “go” button, and the men pushed the equipment out of the plane's door and then they jumped. His stick was spread out, but Nat always felt lucky that he did not land in a flooded, asparagus-stick filled water trap, nor was he hit by fire during his drop to the ground. He was able to re-group with about 5 or 6 of his men, and they decided that with Germans everywhere they should bury the communication equipment so it did not fall into enemy hands. After doing this, and cutting some coffee-can sized German communication wires that were lying on top of the ground, the men started walking toward what they hoped would be Hiesville, the designated HQ of the 101<sup>st</sup>. They had several evasive close-calls during the night, and by dawn decided to hole up in the outside perimeter of a farmer's field, next to some infamous French boucages, or hedgerows, that were so difficult to penetrate. The U.S. men were eventually cornered by a large group of German soldiers who started firing into the boucages where they were hiding. Feeling responsible for those with him and firmly believing that dead heroes are of little use to anyone, Nat shouted that they'd had enough and quickly got a response from a German speaking perfect English: “Well, Bub, if you've had enough, then come on out.” It turns out the German had lived in Brooklyn for 14 years and had come home to fight for his Motherland.

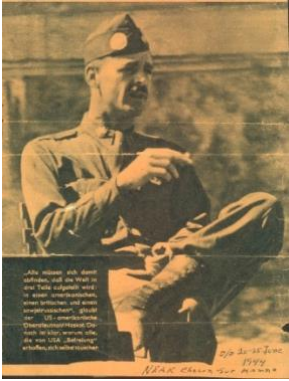
The Germans separated Nat from his fellow captured paratroopers presumably because of his rank as a Lt Col. He was taken to some sort of German headquarters located in a manor house that was chaotic and teeming with military activity reacting to the surprise of the day's invasion. They told him to "sit here", which he did for a few hours until a call from nature prompted him to get up to find some relief. Walking into another room, he startled German staffers inside who were frantically manning phones, typewriters and radios, and who claimed to be previously unaware of his presence. Not knowing what to do with him that evening - he was the only POW brought to that location - they bunked him in a tent in between two German radio operators, who were quite civil to him and shared their bread and a cigarette with him.

The next morning, they marched him "about mile or so" down the road to a staging area where about 150 Allied POWs had been gathered. When the German commander ordered Nat to get the men loaded onto the five or six canvas-covered trucks to take them south and away from the fighting, Nat refused because the trucks were not marked with either a red cross or the letters "POW". He got slapped about a bit for his refusal and the POWs loaded up under threats from the guards. Before the convoy departed Etienville the POWs were warned that if they tried to escape from the trucks, even in the event of any kind of an attack, they would be shot.

90 minutes after leaving Etienville, the POW convoy was on a small country road in Le Mesnil-Vigot, a tiny village located on road D 900 between Periers and St. Lô. Nat had been placed in the back seat of an open Jeep at the rear of the line, jammed next to a rotund German sergeant. All of a sudden they saw the approach of three P-40's which fired on the convoy, setting the canvas truck covers on fire. The planes returned two more times. Nat jumped from the Jeep and ran to help men escape from the burning trucks. The Germans were yelling at him to get away, and they shot and killed one escaping prisoner - an action that resulted in a War Crimes charge and trial after the war. For his actions that day in saving a number of POWs and encouraging other prisoners to help him, Nat was later awarded a Silver Star.

Out of the roughly 150 POWs in the convoy, 19 were killed and approximately 45 were injured. The German guards, who tended to be either quite old or very young, were clueless as to what to do next. Ultimately, they marched the uninjured further on down the road to Chapelle-sur-Vire, and left Nat and a couple of German guards in Le Mesnil-Vigot for the next 5 days to arrange for care for the injured and the burial of the dead. On June 8 and 9 the local farmers dug one mass grave in the churchyard of the village's Catholic church, and after Nat demanded that the German guards remove their hats in respect, he said a few prayers over the dead. The village families were incredible in their assistance in providing what they could for the injured soldiers - tearing down curtains and ripping up wedding

dresses for bandages, making what food they had provisions for, and providing space, sometimes on the dirt floor of a barn, in order to lay out the injured men. Five days after the strafing, the Germans took Nat to Chapelle sur Vire, where he and by now hundreds of prisoners were contained inside barbed wire hastily assembled into a POW camp on the hilled monastery grounds.



Hoskot in "Signal" magazine.

It took another six weeks for him to arrive at his permanent POW camp in Szubin, Poland. At Chalons-sur-Marne, about 115 miles NE of Paris, Nat was interviewed and photographed by a German military journalist, who described him as arrogant and delusional in thinking that the U.S. would be on the winning side in this war. This article and photo were published in the August, 1944 issue of the German propaganda magazine, Signal. Coincidentally, his wife's cousin's husband was sitting on a stack of magazines in the mud in Cherbourg in August, and leafing through a magazine. He saw Nat's picture and sent it home to his in-laws, who of course delivered it to Nat's wife, Peggy. It was comforting and tangible proof that he had survived his jump on D-Day.

Lt. Col. Hoskot arrived at Oflag 64 on July 16, 1944, and settled easily into the regimentations of camp life. Oflag 64 had been an American officers camp for 13 months at that point, and his predecessors had established a well-run camp based on military protocol, systems and procedures. The men kept themselves fit mentally and physically, holding classes taught by fellow POWs, creating a library, and participating in sports, musical and theatrical programs.

Nat's letters home were incredibly optimistic. It was never "if" we get home, it was "when" we get home. He was upbeat, perhaps to bolster the spirits of his wife and one-year old son he had left behind in Carmel, California, but he never seemed to doubt the ultimate outcome of their lives as POWs. He described life inside the barbed wire to his wife, but never so negatively as to worry her or have the censors delete much of what he wrote. There was never enough to eat in camp, so he included food or supplies requests, passed on news he had picked up in camp regarding military friends, and told her of his newly learned skills of bookbinding, shoe repairing, and barbering. Twice he was taken from Oflag 64 to a POW hospital in Wollstein, about 100 miles away, to be treated for ulcers. There he met Italian POWs acting as orderlies for the American officer patients, and one made him some metal gifts – a cup, a cigarette case, an ashtray – personalizing them with words hammered out.

Sometime in October he got word that he was going to be repatriated for medical reasons, which happened on January 5, 1945. The night before he and 4 other Oflag 64 POWs



(Myrick Monroe, Lawrence Higgins, Frank Maxwell, and Jack Kazebeer) were due to leave camp, a few of Nat's camp friends had a party in "Zimmer Funf und zwanzig". One was an artist who drew the invitation with the menu they cobbled together and shared as the POWs did throughout their incarceration. Nat said it was incredibly hard to leave the next morning, and very sad to see the long faces on some of the other POW "lads".

These POWs were first taken to Annaburg in Saxony, where they were given the chance to clean up with haircuts and clean uniforms. They were taken by train to Geneva, Switzerland, where they were exchanged for an equal number of German POWs who had come up from Marseilles after coming across the Atlantic on the POW exchange ship, the



1 Hoskot is on the left in the back row.

"Gripsholm". The American Red cross gave Nat and his fellow POWs "great big care packages", and they all got a bit sick eating too much food they weren't accustomed to. (A Red Cross worker told Nat that when the Germans crossed into Germany, they got an apple and a picture of Hitler.) They continued their train trip to Marseilles where they boarded the USA hospital ship "Ernest Hinds". Before it had a chance

to sail, Nat was taken off the ship, flown to Le Bourget Airport outside of Paris and then flown home to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC. Presumably he was wanted for interrogation about conditions inside Oflag 64, as there were plans afoot to try to free the POWs, although he arrived home just about the time the Germans evacuated the camp in the face of the approaching Russian army. Nat was a patient at Walter Reed for one week (where they charged him for his week of meals!) had new uniforms made, and flew home to Boise, Idaho. His wife, Peggy, son Nick (Nathaniel, Jr), parents, family and friends were understandably exuberant to see him.

After a few weeks at home, Nat was sent back to Paris – no doubt a violation of some sort – but he was there for office duties and not further combat. He was in Paris when the Allies' victory in Europe was declared on May 8, 1945. He returned to the U.S. in June to prepare to go to the Pacific, but then the war there ended in August.

Nat chose to remain in the Army after the war, and after a few months in the states his next assignment was to be the Assistant Military Attaché in the American Embassy in New Delhi, India. He started this new job in February, 1946, and his wife and son followed him in September of that year, sailing on the first postwar ship that went from San Francisco to Bombay (now Mumbai) carrying military dependents. When India received its independence from Great Britain on August 15, 1947, Nat was transferred to the newly-created country of Pakistan, where he was the first U.S. military attaché in the then-capital

of Karachi. With the October birth of daughter Anne in the strife-torn city of New Delhi, his family did not join him in Pakistan until January, 1948.

They all returned to the U.S. in June, 1948, and for two years the family lived a fairly normal military life of schools and new assignments, until the Korean War upended that routine. Shortly after Nat became the HQ G-3 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea and the Division was ordered to Korea. He spent a year in the Korean War, and returned home in 1951 to attend the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk. This was followed by a transfer to Ft Bragg for three years, partly spent as the Commander of the 325th PIR of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. He went to Maxwell Air Force Base for a one-year school, followed by a transfer to Heidelberg for 2 years as Deputy Commander and then Commander of HACOM and subsequently as Chief of Staff of the Berlin Command for a year. Returning to the U.S. in 1959, he had his first and only assignment to the Pentagon, for which he was grateful. He spent part of this last assignment as the Army liaison between the Pentagon and the Kennedy White House, before retiring in August, 1963.

Nat received a number of awards in his long military career, with the highest being the Silver Star for the convoy strafing incident. His certificate said: *“Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel R. Hoskot, while a prisoner of war near St. Lô, France, on 7 June, 1944, displayed outstanding devotion to duty and gallantry in action. When five truckloads of American prisoners were attacked by American aircraft, the German guards took cover and refused to permit the captives to disperse. Disregarding his personal safety, Colonel Hoskot removed wounded men from burning trucks during three savage strafing attacks and inspired fellow prisoners to assist him”*.

Some of his other awards included: the Air Medal for service in Korea in an unarmed single-engine plane which was directing artillery fire, the Master Parachutist Badge, two Bronze Stars, and perhaps the most exotic, a Nepalese award called the Badge and the Star of Prasiddha Pravala Gorkha Dkshina Bahu.

Retirement for Nat meant new and enticing opportunities. He went to work for Hughes Tool Company, Aircraft Division, in Culver City, California and spent 15 months in Vietnam, where he was able to visit with son Nick in 1967, then a Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. serving in-country with the First Bn, First Marines.

In 1973 Peggy accompanied Nat when he went to work for BredaNardi Aeronautiche in Milan, Italy as their Director of International Marketing for nine years. Both Nat and Peggy thrived on international travel, and loved living abroad.

When they returned to Virginia in 1982, Nat kept busy for many years with volunteer work at both Traveler's Aid at National (now Ronald Reagan) Airport, and also at the information desk at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum.



Nat and Peggy were both in their early 90's when they died just weeks apart in 2004, and were fortunate enough to be buried in a joint ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, where Nat was accorded full military honors including a marching band, a platoon of soldiers, a riderless horse and a 21-gun salute. Held on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, the ceremony was a fitting tribute to a veteran's life well lived. It was flags-in at the cemetery on all of the almost 400,000 grave sites, and because that day was the dedication of the WW II Memorial just 3 miles away in Washington, DC, the cemetery was teeming with aging WW II veterans in their hats and service memorabilia. It was a most appropriate addition to the day.

Nat and Peggy are survived by three children: Nathaniel Hoskot, Jr (Nick) of Moulton, TX, Anne Hoskot Kreutzer, of Woodbridge, VA and David Hoskot, Surfers Paradise, AU, and five grandchildren.

Biography written by Anne Hoskot Kreutzer in collaboration with her siblings.