



# DARTMOUTH CLASS OF 1972



Spring Term 2018

## MILITARY SERVICE AND THE PARENTS OF THE CLASS OF 1972

**Bill Roberts** writes: "My Dad was born in Evanston, IL, in 1924. His Uncle Carl was Dartmouth Class of 1920; the Great War interrupted his studies; and although he never graduated, he was a loyal alumnus. Uncle Carl lived in Scarsdale, NY, and was delighted when my dad entered the Class of 1946 and he could be his nephew's home away from home. (He and Aunt Dorothy were also my home away from home, and hosted some classmates as well.)

One of Dad's classmates remembered that he roomed in Richardson Hall as a freshman, one of 600 undergraduates who matriculated in September 1942.

Dad learned to ski at Dartmouth, so when the Tenth Mountain Division Ski Troops came calling, he was among many other classmates and alumni who joined up. To read their names, please click [here](#) and go to page 55.

In 2014, Ingrid and I visited all the beaches of Normandy just ahead of the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings. And then, that June 6, my Dad died. Although Dad fought in the Italian Campaign, June 6 was always a special day for him, as for many of his generation (and ours). Because my Dad's dad was born on June 6, 1890, Dad's surviving sister Betty was comforted to know that their lives were bookends – one life begun and one life ended on June 6. After Dad died, I learned about the 10th Mountain Division Resource Center at the Denver (CO) Public Library. Keli Schmid, the Archivist and Librarian, was able to send me dozens of 10th Mountain payroll and daily reports.

(If your father served in the 10th Mountain Division, I'd be happy to give you the contact information. Apparently, every branch of the Armed Forces still keeps these kinds of reports for everyone who served then – although some of these records have been lost in fires over the years. It's worth contacting your parents' service branches to see what information they may have about yours.)

Here are a few of the things I learned about my Dad's service from the Resource Center:

When Dad was 17 years old, he joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps (ERC) on December 18, 1941, eleven days after Pearl Harbor.

(The ERC was created under the National Defense Act of 1920, along with an Officers Reserve Corps and a Reserve Officers' Training Corps.)



Dad was called to active duty on May 7, 1943, and immediately joined the 10th Mountain Division at Camp Hale, CO, where the ski troops underwent rock climbing and cold-weather survival as well as ski training.

His first payroll report shows he paid \$6.50 every month for Government Life Insurance under the National Service Life Insurance program, with a maximum face value of \$10,000.

During World War II, a Private in the Army made \$50 per month, and my Dad reserved \$18.75 to purchase war bonds and stamps to support the war effort.

When I asked Keli the difference between a War Bond and War Stamps, she wrote back:

"If you were not able afford an entire bond at one time (the lowest bond amount being \$18.75), \$.10 savings stamps could be purchased and collected in Treasury approved stamp albums until you had enough saved to buy a bond."

I noticed that my Dad was pretty generous in giving to the war effort, compared with the other men on the payroll pages, she wrote:

"Your dad spent more on bonds than any other soldiers I've seen. It looks like he bought one bond every month. Whether this was because he believed in the war effort more passionately, or was forward-thinking enough to see the benefits of investment, or he simply did not have other financial obligations, is difficult to say.

"[The war bonds'] main purpose was to fight the war of course, but their secondary purpose was to take money out of circulation to keep inflation down. The combination of war bonds and rationing coupons worked together to reduce the money supply, and by making it harder to buy goods using cash, the government prevented inflation. The return on U. S. war bonds was 2.9% after 10 years. So, a bond purchased for \$18.75 would return \$25 in ten years."

The reports also show that my Dad's "Principal arms" were Rifle and Pistol.

One delightful entry notes that on May 13, 1944, my Dad had a Special Order to report for duty to the Regimental Bugler's School. Dad had been a member of Evanston Township High School's Marching Band and played the French horn. I remember Dad's playing his bugle when I was about 8 or so.

Other excerpts from the Resource Center's report:

"As a member of the 86th Infantry Regiment, James was among the first from the Division to deploy to Italy.

"The 86th departed Camp Swift by train November 29, 1944 and arrived at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, December 2. There they made final preparations for deployment to Italy, although for security reasons the men did not know where they were going until they were well out to sea.

"The men boarded the USS *Argentina* December 11 and arrived at Naples, Italy, December 22.

"Although combat was almost continuous for four months, the 10th fought three major battles against the German Army in Italy: February 18-25, March 2-6, and April 14-May 2, 1945. The German Army surrendered on May 2, 1945.

"Following occupation duty in northern Italy, the 10th Mountain Division was ordered back to the U.S. for further training on July 14, 1945 in preparation for the invasion of Japan. Plans called for the division to attack Kyushu on November 2, 1945. Fortunately, the Japanese surrender made this invasion unnecessary.

"The 86th Infantry Regiment Returned to the States from Livorno July 26, 1945 on the SS *Westbrook Victory*, arriving Newport News, Virginia on August 7."

Among other articles and websites on the Tenth Mountain Division, I've read *Climb to Conquer* by Peter Shelton and *The Last Ridge* by McKay Jenkins. The former mentions a Dartmouth student on page 1, the first of many Dartmouth references; and I found this passage in *The Last Ridge*:

"Communications during the attack [on Riva Ridge, February 18-25, 1945] would be a special challenge, since the need for silence made the nighttime use of radios out of the question. Just prior to the assault, a small advance party laid phone wire, concealed in the snow, from battalion command at Farne to all areas of departure. The plan was for a wire team to follow each column during the assault and provide hourly location reports back to command."

For the first time, I understood the context for my Dad's Bronze Star citation:

"James H. Roberts PFC, Infantry. 86th Mountain Infantry, United States Army,

"For meritorious service in combat on 19 Feb. 1945, near Farni [sic], Italy.

"When Private First Class Roberts was engaged in laying communication wire along a mountain ridge, the enemy infiltrated into the wire in which he was working. When he and his comrades were stopped by small arms fire they immediately attacked the infiltrating enemy, capturing eight prisoners. They then continued forward to complete their telephone lines, establishing communications at a time when the coordination and the direction of an attack depended on the completion of their mission. For his outstanding courage and devotion to duty Private First Class Roberts has earned the highest commendation and praise.

"Entered the Military service from Evanston, Ill.

"By command of Major General Hays."



Years ago, I kept pestering my Dad to send me the words on his citation, which were framed with his Bronze Star; and finally he did, accompanied with this note:

“Bill+ I would kind of prefer you not doing anything with this, and I’m sorry it’s taken so long to respond, forgive me. But for your info thought you might like to see it. It’s a copy right off the paper in a frame [my] mother did long ago.

“Hope all O. K. and love Dad”

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I was struck by how much Dad didn’t want to make a big deal out of his Bronze Star recognition.