

Jobs
Cars
Real Estate
Mortgages
Apartments
Classified
Sales/Deals
Place an Ad
Coupons

News
Connecticut
Towns
Latest News
Education
Health
NE Magazine
Politics
Specials
World/Nation

Business
Life
Sports
Opinion
Obituaries
ctnow.com

Dining
Movies
Music
Nightlife
Stage
TV/Radio

Site Tools
Yellow Pages
Maps
Traffic
Weather
Site Map
RSS Feeds
[XML](#)

Services
Subscribe
Archives

courant.com the web



[Log in](#) [Register](#) [Services](#)

CONNECTICUT NEWS

Veteran Paratroopers Join Elite Fraternity In Ritual Known As 'Prop Blast Ceremony'

February 20, 2006

By ALAINE GRIFFIN, Courant Staff Writer

Walter Hughes literally jumped at the chance to get hazed Sunday, pretending to parachute out of a C-47 in Hartford so he could join an elite fraternity of veteran paratroopers.

Forty of his comrades joined him for the 82nd Airborne Division Association of Greater Hartford's first-ever "prop blast ceremony," a ritual begun more than six decades ago to foster fraternity and morale among airborne troopers.

That's how long it took Hughes - a highly decorated World War II veteran with two combat jumps - to earn the rite of passage that at one time was available only to officers.

ADVERTISEMENT

Thirteen paratroopers stationed at Fort Benning, Ga., started the prop blast ritual in December 1940, naming it after the blast of air that jumpers felt after exiting aircraft. The ceremony lost its luster when it became more about drinking and hazing. The military frowned on it during the Vietnam era after deaths of paratroopers from acute alcohol poisoning were reported.

"Over the years it had a checkered history," said David Cole, chairman of the airborne division's local chapter and an organizer of Sunday's ceremony. "It became more like a college fraternity thing."

Today, only regimental commanders or officers may authorize prop blast ceremonies. Those officials preside over the event, making sure no one is abused, harassed or hazed.

Cole, 73, of Norwalk, carries a yellowed and worn card in his wallet that marks the day he was "prop blasted" on July 8, 1967. Cole, who was Sunday's "jump master," couldn't resist doing a little of his own hazing at Sunday's initiation, held inside Foot Guard Hall on High Street.

Before troopers could make the simulated jump, they were subjected to a round of trivia in which the men were asked about the history of the 82nd Airborne Division and to name weapons and Army gear.

Cole, a walking military library, was in good company as many rattled off the model numbers of rifles as if they had fired them a day earlier.

Sunday's ceremony was a party and reunion for veterans throughout New York

UTILITIES

- [E-mail story](#)
- [Most e-mailed stories](#)
- [Printer-friendly version](#)

MORE HEADLINES

- [Dodd Calls For Body Armor Reimbursement](#)
- [Rell Hopes To Toughen Laws On Meth](#)
- [States Weigh Spam Fight](#)
- [Canine Rookies Take Stage](#)
- [10 Flee As Fire Guts House](#)

RELATED

Related News from the Web

- [Discuss Hartford, CT](#)

Powered by [Topix.net](#)

TOP JOBS

Extras
 HC Jobs
 Reprints
 Pix Reprints
 Browse Ads
 View Page 1
 Media Kit
 Services

and New England, and a history lesson for the paratroopers born just years before the crumbling of the Berlin Wall.

"I've waited 60 years for this," Hughes, 81, of Port Jervis, N.Y., said to fresh-faced Ryan McKenna, 21, an Army sergeant from Manchester who recently served in Iraq and Afghanistan. "God, I never thought I'd live long enough to do it."

McKenna said he was humbled by the resumes of his new fraternity brothers, a graying group with hearing aids and a slowed march.

"They look like a bunch of old guys with canes," said John Moriarty, 68, of Somers, a paratrooper in the mid-1950s, as he watched his fellow veterans on the stage, doing bunny-hops out of a pretend door of a makeshift C-47. "But what you're really looking at is part of the best fighting force America ever had."

McKenna said today's paratroopers could benefit from a rebirth of the prop blast initiation, as long as the event is conducted like Sunday's ceremony.

McKenna admitted he was a bit nervous leading his group into initiation. But the upbeat ribbing matched with the mutual respect McKenna said he received bonded him with an extraordinary group of men. "This really gives you a sense of camaraderie," McKenna said. "I feel like one of them."

Interact with The Courant:

- > [Email](#) Reader Rep. Karen Hunter with comments.
- > [Visit](#) Karen's daily Blog.
- > [View](#) today's corrections.
- > [Subscribe](#) to The Courant.
- > [Request](#) reprints/permissions.
- > [Search](#) our archives from 1764-1922 and 1992-2006.

from [CareerBuilder](#)

[SALES CONTRACTOR -
NEWSPAPER SALES
THE HARTFORD COURANT](#)

[QA ANALYST /
INSURANCE / BUSINESS
ANALYST / VB / .NET
PROG
INSURITY](#)

[RETAIL MANAGER
NOT SPECIFIED](#)

[SENIOR TOOL & DIE
MAKER
NEW ENGLAND
INDUSTRIES, INC](#)

[SENIOR APPLICATIONS
DEVELOPER
HEALTH NEW ENGLAND](#)

[INSIDE SALES / CALL
CENTER /
TELEMARKETING
PEOPLES PRODUCTS](#)

[RESIDENTIAL
SUPERVISOR / HUMAN
SERVICES
THE VILLAGE FOR
FAMILIES & CHILDREN,
INC.](#)

[REAL ESTATE TRAINING
REAL ESTATE SCHOOL OF
NEW ENGLAND](#)

[MULTIPLE POSITIONS
AVAILABLE
LIA AUTO GROUP](#)

[H R DIRECTOR
HAGGETT LONGBARDI](#)

[View All Top Jobs](#)
[Post A Job](#)

Ads by Google

World War 1

Every soldier has a story. Search military records for your ancestors

Ancestry.com

World War 2 Veteran

Over 20 Million Records. Free Locator - Reconnect Now!

www.military.com

Veteran Apparel & Gear

Huge Selection of Quality Veteran Clothing & Veterans Accessories.

militarysearch.usptgear.com

World War 2 D Day items

Ideal place for World War II D Day items and other Military products

<http://www.soldiercity.com>

Ultimate Soldier

We carry Ultimate Soldier, Dragon WW2 militaria and more!

www.bkcollectibles.com

[» Courant.com](#)

[» About Us](#)

[» Contact Us](#)

[» Privacy Policy](#)

[» Terms Of Service](#)

[» Shopping](#)

[» Jobs](#)

[» Cars](#)

[» Real Estate](#)

[» Classified](#)

[» Entertainment](#)

courant.com is Copyright © 2006 by The Hartford Courant

Partners: [CareerBuilder.com](#) for [Jobs](#) | [Cars.com](#) for [Autos](#) | [Apartments.com](#) for [Rentals](#) | [ShopLocal.com](#) for [Shopping](#)