



PHOTO BY JIM KNOWLES

Peter Schantz received a framed souvenir after speaking to the battalion that he served in during World War II.

By Jim Knowles

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The last time Peter Schantz met with his battalion he was riding a Harley 45 along the Red Ball Express, keeping the supplies moving toward the front into Nazi Germany.

Today, it's a little quieter, but his unit is still active and Schantz recently appeared at their reunion in Alaska.

The 793rd Military Police Battalion is based at Ft. Richardson, near Anchorage, Alaska. Schantz was invited to speak, so the troops in the 793rd could hear their battalion's history first-hand.

Schantz – who has lived in the same house in San Leandro for 59 years – made it a family trip with his wife, Faye, and son, Joel. He also made the trip in remembrance of his son David who passed away this year.

Schantz was just 18 when he was drafted and he was sent to Europe at 19. Before D-Day, he helped set up convoys running from Scotland to Wales.

“I was doing escort duty on a Harley 45 or a Jeep,” Schantz said. “One day we escorted Field Marshall Montgomery.”

A couple of months after D-Day, the 793rd landed on Utah Beach in Normandy.

“But it was 10 days before we could move,” Schantz said. “They were still fighting the Germans at Saint Lo, just 40 miles from the beach.”

Schantz and his fellow MPs were later stationed at crossroads in France to keep the supplies moving toward the front – three MPs stationed at each crossroad, keeping the traffic moving on one direction. Other roads were used for traffic going in the opposite direction.

“There was no cooking,” Schantz said. “The sergeant brought us K-rations. That’s all we ate.”

Later they were sent to Antwerp to work security at the port. Schantz found out there was quite a bit of pilferage going on, as the Dutch workers were helping themselves to the supplies.

“We usually worked inside the fence, but one night we went outside the fence and found 420 cases of cigarettes the workers tossed over,” Schantz said.

Later in the war, the 793rd was sent to Marseilles, a town so tough that the U.S. military declared a lot of it off limits to American soldiers. But the MPs had to patrol those areas.

“Soldiers got passes into town and we had to patrol those areas,” Schantz said. “We only lost one soldier, an American Indian. A woman who owned a bar had her henchmen kill him.”

While in Alaska, Schantz also gave his recollection of the old days of the 793rd for a video to preserve the history of the battalion.

Despite the fact they were military police, back in World War II the 793rd didn't receive much police training. They were trained for combat and only had a very brief course in traffic control, Schantz said.

Today, the battalion is much better trained, said Schantz, who was impressed with today's 793rd Battalion as he toured Ft. Richardson. The battalion has been deployed to Kosovo and Iraq and will probably be sent back to the Middle East again, he said.

"They do a good job, they're well trained," Schantz said.