

BENINI CAREER SUPPLEMENT – Adcock telephone interview

NOVEMBER 19, 2009 – NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA – Today I had the pleasure of further discussing CMSgt Alicide E. “Bull” Benini’s memories of his transition from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Air Force. For the record, I asked Benini his age and date of birth. He responded, age 88, born 15 October 1921.

In 1947, Benini returned from an assignment with the 11th Airborne Division; then in Japan. Upon his



return to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division’s Pathfinder Platoon, a relatively small, stand-alone operation of approximately 50 soldiers. His previous experiences during WWII and the 11th Airborne Division had positioned him well for assignment to the Pathfinder Platoon.

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Benini in 1949 - Shown here at 28 years of age during the time he was assigned to the Pathfinder Platoon.

During his four-year assignment to the Pathfinder Platoon, Benini was fully trained in the skills necessary for qualification as a Pathfinder; in addition he was qualified as a Master Parachutist. In 1951, Benini was ***bucking*** for promotion and pathfinders were not getting promoted. Much to his chagrin he could see the handwriting on the wall; he had to leave the pathfinders to get promoted.

In late 1951, Benini transferred to B Company of the Division’s 1st Regiment. The move to a line company in the Division was made strictly to improve his promotion possibilities. During the 1951-1952 timeframe, he was immersed in training soldiers, preparing pipeline troops for deployment to the Korean War. It was during this time that he was promoted to Master Sergeant (E-7).

In the five years Benini was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, two things happened that would have a profound impact on his military career.

1. In the year before he moved to B Company, an Air Force Captain Jim Baker (a jump-qualified pilot) often visited the Pathfinder Platoon. Baker – ***the USAF Pathfinder Team Project Officer*** – traveled from Donaldson AFB, SC to Ft. Bragg on a monthly basis, often spending a week or more in his attempt to recruit volunteers for the planned USAF Pathfinder Teams. Baker often

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jumped with the Pathfinder Platoon during his visits. It was during one of these visits that Baker and Benini struck up a friendship.

2. During his assignments at Ft. Bragg, the 82nd Airborne Division Military Police were apparently under-tasked and overeager to enforce any perceived infraction of often vague regulations. Benini was cited several times for minor infractions and on one occasion had to report (presumably for reprimand) to the Division Commander. He was ordered to report, along with all of his intermediate commanders, to answer a baseless charge. With Benini *standing on the carpet*, along with his intermediate commanders, Major General Thomas P. Hickey, Division Commander called the whole incident *bullshit* and told them all to get out of his office and forget the whole thing. As a result of this and other such incidents, Benini's dissatisfaction bubbled over and he started looking for a new job, something outside the Division.

In July 1952, the Bull learned that an Army Colonel by the name of Aaron Banks was forming a new organization at Ft. Bragg. It was to be designated U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) and they would be operating in some old buildings located at Smoke Bomb Hill. Benini was interested; it was a way out of the Division. Searching through the post telephone lists, he found Colonel Banks' phone number and called him directly. On the phone, Benini recounted his qualifications and Banks responded; ***"I want you to report for duty right away."*** Benini asked ***"What about transfer orders."*** Banks responded: ***"You report tomorrow, I'll take care of the damn orders."***

After his transfer to the new Special Forces organization, the SF staff reviewed his extensive training record and decided that he needed to be an instructor in the newly forming organization. In addition to his professional skills, the SF staff learned that the Bull could speak two foreign languages. This further enhanced his qualifications for the new SF unit.

During Benini's assignments with the Pathfinder Platoon, the Division and later during the Special Forces assignment, Captain Baker continued his monthly visits Ft. Bragg. But he wasn't having much luck recruiting the soldiers he wanted. During one of Baker 1952-visits he stopped by to see Benini, to further discuss the Air Force need and urge Benini to strongly consider a transfer. Later, in 1952, Baker finally convinced Benini to take a trip to Donaldson AFB, to talk to General Douglass about the reassignment offer. Benini accepted the visit invitation and drove to Donaldson Air Force Base.

Upon arriving at the General's office, Baker escorted Benini inside. Baker introduced Benini, then stepped aside allowing the two to talk. Douglass talked about Air Force plans and promised Benini that he would transfer him over at his present rank of Master Sergeant (E-7). Additionally, told Benini that he would be the first Combat Control NCOIC and he would be a leading architect of the new Air Force Pathfinder Teams. Benini returned to Bragg with a lot to think about.

- Benini decided that he was relatively satisfied with his new assignment with Special Forces, but the Division harassment continued for all soldiers at Bragg; and he was tired of it.

Over the next couple of weeks, Benini and Baker had more discussions about the new Air Force Pathfinder team and the service-to-service transfer process. It was later learned that a service-to-service transfer was not the best option. Near the end of 1952, Baker worked up a transfer plan that was seen as risky by Benini, but he decided to go with it. The offer included ***three promises*** that, if broken, could prove fatal to his career. Baker told Benini:

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1. In January 1953 take your scheduled discharge from the U.S. Army, report to Donaldson AFB and enlist in the U.S. Air Force.
2. The Air Force will enlist you as an Airman First Class (E-4, A/1C); promote you to Technical Sergeant (E-6, TSgt) on the same set of orders.
3. In six months you will be promoted to your current rank of Master Sergeant (E-7, MSgt).

Benini wasn't overjoyed with the ground rules. But after a great deal of thought about the Air Force offer and the Army harassment, he accepted the offer.

On January 9, 1953, the newly discharged Benini drove to Donaldson AFB. The next day, he was enlisted in the Air Force as an A/1C and promoted to TSgt on the same set of orders. Six months later he was promoted to MSgt – as promised.

In closing our November 19, 2009 conversation, Benini said to me; ***“Adcock, it was the best decision I ever made.”***

Ed.Note: This article supplements the Benini biography found on page 125 of **The Eye of the Storm**.