

Jake McNiece

James Elbert "Jake" McNiece (May 24, 1919 – January 21, 2013) was a US Army paratrooper in World War II. Sergeant McNiece was a member of the Filthy Thirteen, an elite demolition unit whose exploits inspired the 1965 novel and 1967 film *The Dirty Dozen*.^[1]

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Early life

James McNiece was born on May 24, 1919 in Maysville, Oklahoma, the ninth of ten children born to Eli Hugh and Rebecca (née Ring) McNiece, and of partial Choctaw descent. During the Depression, the family moved to Ponca City, Oklahoma in 1931. In 1939, he graduated from Ponca City High School and went to work in road construction, and then at the Pine Bluff Arsenal, where he gained experience in the use of explosives.^{[1][2]}

Military career

McNiece enlisted for military service on September 1, 1942. He was assigned to the demolition saboteur section of what was then the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. This section would become the Filthy Thirteen, first led by Lieutenant Charles Mellen, who was killed in action on June 6, 1944 during the Invasion of Normandy. Following Mellen's death, Sergeant McNiece led the unit.

McNiece's demolitions experience with the fire department before the war made him the section sergeant and his mission focus kept him in that rank in spite of his deliberate disobedience and disrespect during training. His first sergeant and company commanders knew he was the man the regiment could count on during

Jake McNiece	
Nickname(s)	"McNasty"
Born	May 24, 1919 <div> <u>Maysville, Oklahoma, U.S.</u></div>
Died	January 21, 2013 (aged 93) <div> <u>Chatham, Illinois, U.S.</u></div>
Allegiance	 United States
Service/branch	 United States Army
Years of service	1942–1946
Rank	 <u>First Sergeant</u>
Unit	<u>506th Parachute Infantry Regiment</u> <u>101st Airborne Division</u>
Battles/wars	<u>World War II</u> <u>Normandy landings</u> <u>Operation Market Garden</u> <u>Siege of Bastogne</u> <u>Prüm</u>
Awards	 <u>Bronze Star</u> (4) <u>Purple Heart</u> (2) <u>Legion of Honour</u>

combat.^[3] His escapades are documented in his words in *The Filthy Thirteen*, *Fighting With the Filthy Thirteen*, and *War Paint; The Filthy Thirteen Jump Into Normandy*.

McNiece went on to make a total of four wartime combat jumps, the first as part of the Invasion of Normandy in 1944. In the same year he jumped as part of Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands, which was featured in the book (and subsequent film), *A Bridge Too Far*,^[1] and at the Siege of Bastogne, part of the larger Battle of the Bulge. During fighting in the Netherlands, he was promoted to demolition platoon sergeant. He volunteered for pathfinder training, anticipating he would sit out the rest of the war training in England,^[4] but his pathfinder stick was called upon to jump into Bastogne to guide in resupply drops. His last jump was in 1945, near Prüm in Germany.^{[1][5]} In recognition of his natural leadership abilities, he ended the war as the acting first sergeant for Headquarters Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was discharged from the military in February 1946.^[1]

After World War II

In 1949, McNiece returned to live in Ponca City. He began a 28-year career with the United States Postal Service. His first wife Rosita died in 1952 and, a year later, he married Martha Beam Wonders. They had two sons and a daughter and remained married until his death.^[1]

Last years

In 1997, historian Richard E. Killblane, also from Ponca City, began recording Jake's oral history of his escapades during the war and wrote *The Filthy Thirteen*, which Casemate Publishers published in 2003. This made Jake an instant celebrity among World War II airborne fans and he toured the United States and Europe educating and entertaining younger generations with his accounts of the war. In 2012, McNiece was awarded the French Legion of Honour *Chevalier* class. He died on January 21, 2013 at the age of 93.^{[5][6]}

Military Awards

- Combat Infantryman Badge
- Parachutist Badge with four combat jump stars
- Pathfinder Badge
- Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" and three oak leaf clusters
- Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster
- Good Conduct Medal
- American Campaign Medal
- European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with arrowhead device and four campaign stars
- World War II Victory Medal
- Army of Occupation Medal with "Germany" clasp
- Chevalier of the Legion of Honor (France)
- Five Overseas service bars

Other honors

McNiece was an inductee in the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame, and an honorary colonel of the 95th Victory Division. He was the recipient of an honorary master's degree in Military Science from Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee. He had participated in military maneuvers there in 1943.^[7] In 2010, an action figure

of McNiece, the last surviving member of the Filthy Thirteen, was released.^[2] In 2017, he was among the first class inducted into the Ponca City High School Hall of Fame.^[8]

See also

- [101st Airborne Division](#)
- [506th Infantry Regiment](#)

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External links

- [Jake McNiece \(https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2960694/\)](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2960694/) on IMDb
 - [Jake McNiece \(https://web.archive.org/web/20130409020629/http://www.libertyjumpteam.org/veteran-tributes/jake-mcniece.html\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20130409020629/http://www.libertyjumpteam.org/veteran-tributes/jake-mcniece.html) at libertyjumpteam.org
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