

# **Down From Heaven:**

The 11th Airborne Division in World War II  
Volume 2: Luzon Campaign & Occupation of Japan

Copyright: Jeremy C. Holm  
1<sup>st</sup> Published: July 1, 2023

The right of Jeremy C. Holm to be identified as author of this Work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, copied in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise transmitted without written permission from the publisher. You must not circulate this book in any format.

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This book may not be resold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Amazon.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Find out more about the author and upcoming books online at [www.jeremycholm.com](http://www.jeremycholm.com) and [www.511pir.com](http://www.511pir.com).

# Prologue

June 2021  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

*“To have been part of a proud unit, a member of the legendary parachute infantry team, elite by any standard — by God that’s a thrill!” — General Edward C. “Shy” Myer, Chief of Staff of the United States Army - 1979*

There is something about a south-western sky that has the ability to take your breath away. I’ve been lucky enough to travel all over the world, and see a lot of incredible vistas, but give me a good south-western sunset and I’m a happy man.

But this evening’s celebration, in June of 2021, made the night all the more unforgettable. Lyndsey and I made the trip down to Albuquerque for the 100th birthday of a very special friend, Staff-Sergeant James B. Wilson of Company B, 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 11th Airborne Division.

Jim was a gentle-giant of a man and we had spent long hours on the phone discussing his experiences as a young Paratrooper in World War II. As anyone who has interviewed such a veteran can tell you, there is something almost sacred about becoming the keeper of such stories that can vary from gut-bustingly funny to heart-breakingly intimate and soul-movingly sad.

With Jim, we had covered it all, from his early days as a Toccoa-man at the historic Camp Toccoa, Georgia in early 1943 to his participation in the 11th Airborne Division’s famous raid on the Los Baños Internment Camp in 1945 to Jim’s final days in the service after



*PFC James Wilson - 1943*

long-months of bloody combat in the Pacific Theater.

Jim told me of their training, the friends he made along the way, the buddies he had buried with tears in his eyes, and how close he came to making history with Japan's surrender onboard the USS *Missouri* on September 2, 1945. I'll let you read about that amazing tale later in this volume.

Because of my background in auto racing and the Olympic winter sport of bobsled, I have sat with governors, CEOs, famous musicians, Olympic gold-medalists and world-champions, INDY 500 winners, well-known entrepreneurs and so on. But to sit with an honest to God real American hero like Jim... it is a humbling experience.

Though mostly wheelchair-bound, Jim's energy was infectious, as was his sense of humor. His eyes twinkled when he laughed and his smile radiated from across the room.

As I sat back to let Jim's family and friends enjoy time with him, I thought of all the other 11th Airborne Angels whom I had the honor of befriending and interviewing over the years. So few were left and as we celebrated Jim's 100th birthday, I felt a tinge of sadness knowing that soon another one of these amazing heroes would make "the final jump" to join all of his comrades who had gone before.

Jim pulled me from my thoughts, shouting, "Jeremy! Come on over, I want to talk some more." I worried I had already monopolized so much of his time that day (and many before), plus his loved ones were all there to be with him, but what do you tell a 100 year old Paratrooper who laid it all on the line in his youth to defend our freedoms and lived a long life on top of it? "No"?

As I scooted a chair by Jim's side, he said, "Thank you for coming. Thank you for listening to me. All my friends are gone. Thank you for telling our story. You are the only one I can talk to about the war."

And so we talked about the war. His mind was razor sharp; I was always impressed with Jim's ability to recall even the tiniest of details about their engagements on Leyte and Luzon, including his participation in the famous rescue mission at the Los Baños Internment Camp, or his squadmates' lives as if it was just yesterday.

He told me again that my first book on the 11th Airborne, *WHEN ANGELS FALL: FROM TOCCOA TO TOKYO, THE 511TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT IN WORLD WAR II* was the



*Author visiting with SSGT James Wilson, B-511 PIR, 11th Airborne Division*

best book on the Angels that he had ever read, that I got it right.

As an author, his words and approval of my work meant the world. But his friendship, that was the treasure beyond words.

When asked what his secret was to such a long life, Jim smiled that big smile of his and said, “Have one Shiner Bock a day.” I don’t drink, so I had to ask for clarification and discovered that Jim happily enjoyed a beer from Shiner, Texas every day.

We enjoyed Jim’s company for several days, but eventually had to make the trip back to “real life” in Utah. Jim and I still talked on the phone for hours at a time and we were excited to make a return trip to New Mexico in 2022 to celebrate his 101st birthday.

But Jim’s big old heart had run long enough. He passed away and made his own final jump early on Thursday, May 12, 2022.

His death reminded me of my own grandfather’s passing in October of 2016. 1st Lieutenant Andrew Carrico III of D Company, 511th

PIR, 11th Airborne Division, was just days away from celebrating his 99th birthday. Like Jim, Grandpa and I spent hours discussing the exploits and achievements of the 11th Airborne Division in World War II. And like so many of those World War II Angels, Grandpa experienced deep frustration that so few knew what they did over there, of the sacrifices they made and the buddies they buried or the memories that would haunt them for the rest of their lives.

I made my grandfather, and Jim, and every Angel I spoke with a promise (and to their families): I'll do all I can to tell the story of the 11th Airborne Division to the world. This, of course, was all before the exciting news that the 11th Airborne Division would be reactivated in Alaska in June of 2022. The promise, of course, now extends to these, our modern Arctic Angels and their loved ones.

After spending half my life standing before crowds to talk about my bobsled and athletic career, I consider it a great honor to share the Angels' history, one that is just as riveting and heroic as the stories so frequently covered (and re-covered) from D-Day, Operation Market Garden, the Battle of the Bulge and so on.

None of the "old" Angels wanted fame or fortune (not even Rod Serling); they just wanted their story told and their unit honored as much as "those screaming Eagle bastards and their publicists" one Angel proclaimed. As I constantly do, they had experienced the credulous questions throughout their lives, "There were Paratroopers in the Pacific?!"

There is always a balance to telling the history of a combat unit. There are stories that veterans tell you that are beyond sacred, almost intimate. Others are so visceral that the general public and casual reader would, perhaps, struggle to comprehend and handle them. It is not a matter of intelligence, but rather the hellacious nature of warfare. As one Angel noted, "There are some events that should not and never will appear in print."

HQ2-511's PFC Deane Marks spoke of such experiences, saying, "The reality of war cannot be even imagined by anyone who hasn't been there. You see none of this in the nonsense movies, only from a poor sucker infantryman can you learn what it's like and infantrymen very seldom talk about it. No one would believe half of what goes on anyway."

This book is dedicated to Major General Joseph May Swing and

the thousands of his Angels, including my grandfather 1LT Andrew Carrico III of D-511 PIR, who fought under his command.

May it, and we, forever honor “The Band of Brothers of the Pacific.”

It is also dedicated to our modern Angels, and their families. When we first heard from USARAK that the 11th Airborne Division was going to be reactivated, there was excitement and pride. I pray this book only serves to strengthen the resolve of the re-activated 11th Airborne Division’s leadership and troopers to wear the division shoulder patch with honor as they serve out great country.

May they never forget those who have gone before, whose story is told in this historical series, and who look “DOWN FROM HEAVEN” as they carry on the traditions of the Angels.

I must thank the numerous Angels, Angelettes, family members and museum staffs who helped make this volume possible, who opened their archives, treasure chests, memories and hearts. The challenge became which stories to tell and which to leave out as the story of the Angels is far too large to tell everyone’s story to satisfaction. I confess to moments of worry over what to include and what to painfully cut.

This book is the second in a two-volume series that is my effort to tell the full World War II history of the 11th Airborne Division. Since the history of the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the subject of my first book *WHEN ANGELS FALL*, is part of the division’s history, readers of that book will find selected pieces and portions in this series. I hope that such repetitions can be forgiven since they deserve to be told and the full history of the 11th Airborne could not be told without them as the 511th PIR played an integral role on Leyte.

To all who read this book, and *WHEN ANGELS FALL*, as well as the first book of this series, *DOWN FROM HEAVEN VOL 1*, I feel the words of HQ-188’s SGT Edward Hammrich said it best: “I do hope that I... have given you an insight of the thoughts and reactions of the civilian soldier trained and led by my estimation, one of the best leaders in military history, General Joseph Swing.”

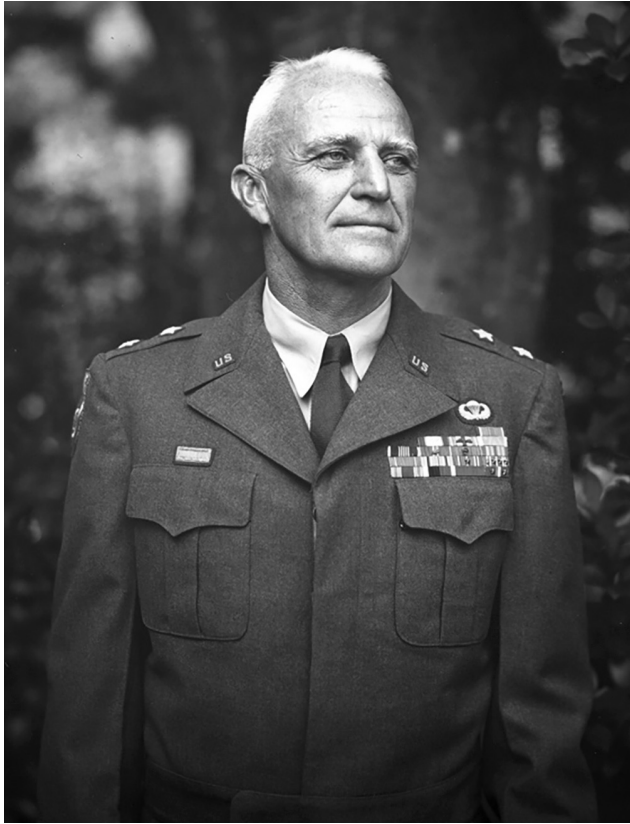
Down From Heaven Comes Eleven! Airborne all the way!

**-Jeremy C. Holm**

*Salt Lake City, UT 2023*

Historian, 11th Airborne Division - [11thairborne.com](http://11thairborne.com)  
& 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment - [511pir.com](http://511pir.com)





**“Wherever the 11th Airborne Division may be assigned, and whatever may be its duty, our country may rest secure in the firm belief that this mighty division of ‘Angels’ will give a good account of itself, wholly in keeping with the finest traditions of the United States armed forces and the spirit of the people of the free world.”**

*- Major General Joseph “Jumping Joe” May Swing,  
division commander of the 11th Airborne Division, 1943-1948.*