



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

JAMES ROBERT BENZINGER

James Robert Benzinger grew up on a dairy farm in Orchard Park, on the same ground the Highmark Stadium currently stands. On July 19, 1943, Mr. Benzinger boarded a train with 25 fellow Canisius College freshmen, and was sent to parts unknown to train for the War.

On October 14, 1944, he boarded "Le Jeune," a decommissioned luxury ocean liner and set sail for Marseilles, France. He was a member of Company "B" of the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 14th Armored Division. They were later called "The Liberators."

Mr. Benzinger's desire was to serve in the United States Air Force; however, on his first day at the rifle range at Camp Roberts in California, he broke records, shooting six bullseyes in the 200, 300 and, unbelievably, the 500 foot range. No longer considered for the Air Force, he was a "Rifleman" and an elite talent who was needed in the United States Army.

His expertise and precision were put to the test on January 3, 1945, when he singlehandedly took out dozens of German soldiers on the field in France. He fought off the enemy for hours until his fellow soldiers could escape. He was awarded the Bronze Star, but for him, more importantly, the respect and admiration of his fellow platoon members. He repeated his bravery in the Battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen, considered by many Generals to be one of the bloodiest and fiercest battles fought in any war. He was to be awarded another Bronze Star for that battle, but refused, stating that even one was more than he deserved. Instead, he wrote up citations and awards for all the men who had fallen around him. Speaking fluent French and German, he was able to translate for his troop, and interrogate SS officers and enemy missives.

The Army continuously tried to raise his rank; however, he refused. He had made a pact with his best friend, Gerald Haag, to remain a Private no matter what. They were high school friends who enlisted together. Tragically, Mr. Haag never returned home from the War. Pvt. Gerald Haag is honored in Orchard Park with his name carved in stone on the War Monument that stands in the center of town - a grim reminder of the life he gave for his country.

Mr. Benzinger returned to Orchard Park and went on to earn two degrees at Canisius College. He became a Town Trustee of Orchard Park and never looked back. He is still with us today at 99 years young.



**JAMES ROBERT BENZINGER WAS SELECTED AS
A 2022 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR SEAN M. RYAN.**

2022