

January 2002

Smokejumper Obituary: Garrett, Paul F. Sr. (Pendleton 1945)

National Smokejumper Association

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National Smokejumper Association, "Smokejumper Obituary: Garrett, Paul F. Sr. (Pendleton 1945)" (2002).
Smokejumper Obituaries. 1170.
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Smokejumper Obituary

Garrett, Paul F. Sr. (Pendleton 1945)

Retired Army Sgt. Maj. Paul F. Garrett Sr., 79, a smokejumper member of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion and the Triple Nickle Association, died March 20, 2001, in Fayetteville, N.C. He was buried with military honors in Sandhills State Veterans Cemetery in Spring Lake, N.C. Born in Childersburg, Ala., he graduated as valedictorian of his 1940 high school class. He enlisted in the Army in 1942 and subsequently completed paratroop training and joined the Triple Nickles in 1944. He was assigned to smokejumping duties with his unit the following year. He served with the 7th Infantry Division during the Korean War, and in 1959 was promoted to first sergeant in the 101st Airborne Division. In 1961, he was assigned to Special Forces and, while with the green berets in Laos that year, he was promoted to sergeant major, the first black soldier to hold that rank. For the next 10 years, his Special Forces assignments included Laos, Thailand, Okinawa and Vietnam. He was discharged in 1971 with decorations that included two Combat Infantry Badges, the Master Parachutist Badge, two Army Commendation Medals and the Vietnam Gallantry Cross. He taught black soldiers to read and write, survived two free-fall accidents and was a role model for desegregation of the military.

(end of excerpt)