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Recent website additions:

[Don Fraser's CP near Col de Braus then and now](#)
[Warbird Magazine article](#) about the 2008 St. Louis Reunion

MailCall News

I am still catching up with news and emails. Bear with me.

A quick side note: On my flights to Asia, I read the latest book from Dan Brown, author of The Da Vinci Code. His latest book is The Lost Symbol, and takes place over 12 hours in Washington DC. The book covers a lot of symbolism and history of Freemasons and their ties to the founders of the US and the builders of Washington DC. The reason I bring this up is that the first section of the book takes place in the visitor's center of the Capitol Building, as well as the Rotunda, the Statuary Hall, and other places that we visited when some of us were in DC for Ben's ceremonies. Anyone who had visited DC might find a lot of interesting and obscure history about the Capitol as well as other nearby monuments and buildings (although only partially believable).

On to business: There's some very remarkable stuff in this MailCall. More pictures from Draguignan, info from the son of the very first 517th soldier killed (at Camp MacKall!), La Tour De France in Belgium, Audie Murphy's widow, souvenirs from the 1973 reunion, letter from Col. Graves before The Jump, info on Louis Rennick (B Co.), and finally, the date for the 2011 Florida mini-reunion. Whew!

-- BB

Bob,

I am shocked at what I see in these pictures of the airborne museum in Le Muy, France. I can see Mickael, Eric, and their friends have their hands full cleaning up the mess left from the flood. I want to reiterate what Tom Copey has said. Our prayer and thoughts do go out to you, and all of your friends helping to clean up the mess. When time permits, I know the 517th PRCT Association would like to know what we can do to help restore the museum. I know when I visited there in 2004, seeing the Museum with my Dad was a highlight of our trip, and to see equipment my Dad recognized made the visit even more special. Thank you Mickael and Eric and all of the people of Le Muy for making this museum a living memory to the men of the 517th PRCT.

Lory Curtis, son of Bud Curtis, HQ, 1st BN

From Patricia and Roland Orengo

pictures of Draguignan after the awful flooding !

http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/inondations_draguignan_var.pps

[Note: This is a big file. 6MB. It might take a while to load if you don't have a fast connection.--BB]

From: Jesse Ellington [jellingtons@yahoo.com]
Sent: Thursday, July 08, 2010 8:29 PM
To: webmaster@517prct.org
Subject: Jesse Ellington A Co.

My father was in the 517th Co. A and died at Camp Mackall Oct. 1st, 1943 and I can not find out anything about what happened. Ralph Harmon was at his funeral. I was 3. I heard he was called Pop Ellington because he was 32yrs old. I have check all the published photos and can not find any with him and no mention of is death. I understand he was the 1st trooper to die. I sure hope someone will remember him and contact me.

Thanks.

Tough Paratroopers Cry At Cincinnati's Funeral

Paratroopers don't cry, but there were tears on the cheeks of every member of Company A, 517th Parachute Infantry, at Camp Mackall, N. C., the other day.

The company had lost its first member, Pvt. Jesse Ellington, 33, of 2465 Warsaw avenue, and Jesse was a swell guy. The jumpers couldn't hold back the tears at the military funeral for Pvt. Ellington Monday.

That's the story Pvt. Ralph W. Harmon, 30, of Toledo, told Thursday as he attended the funeral here for Pvt. Ellington. Pvt. Harmon, a buddy of Pvt. Ellington, escorted his companion's body to Cincinnati.

"Jesse was the first man to go since our outfit was organized," Pvt. Harmon said. "And he was such a swell guy. He didn't have an enemy."

And members of Company A showed how they felt about Pvt. Ellington. They dug down in their pockets and came up with more than \$100 to buy a floral display for their buddy. The display, made up by a Cincinnati florist, was a flower replica of the paratrooper emblem—wings with an open parachute extended over them. The display consisted of white gladiolas, carnations and chrysanthemums.

"We're supposed to be tough guys," Pvt. Harmon said, "and we don't cry. But you couldn't hold back the tears when Jesse died."

The government informed Pvt. Ellington's relatives here that he had been killed in an accident last Friday at Camp Mackall and offered no details. Pvt. Harmon said he could not elaborate on the government statement.

"Jesse had eight jumps to his credit," Pvt. Harmon said. "He was a machine gunner and he was good. He didn't have an enemy in camp and any soldier can tell you that's something."

Pvt. Harmon said the executive officer at Camp Mackall put out a little box where money could be donated for flowers for Pvt. Ellington.

"And every member of the company—135 men—chippen in," Pvt. Harmon said.

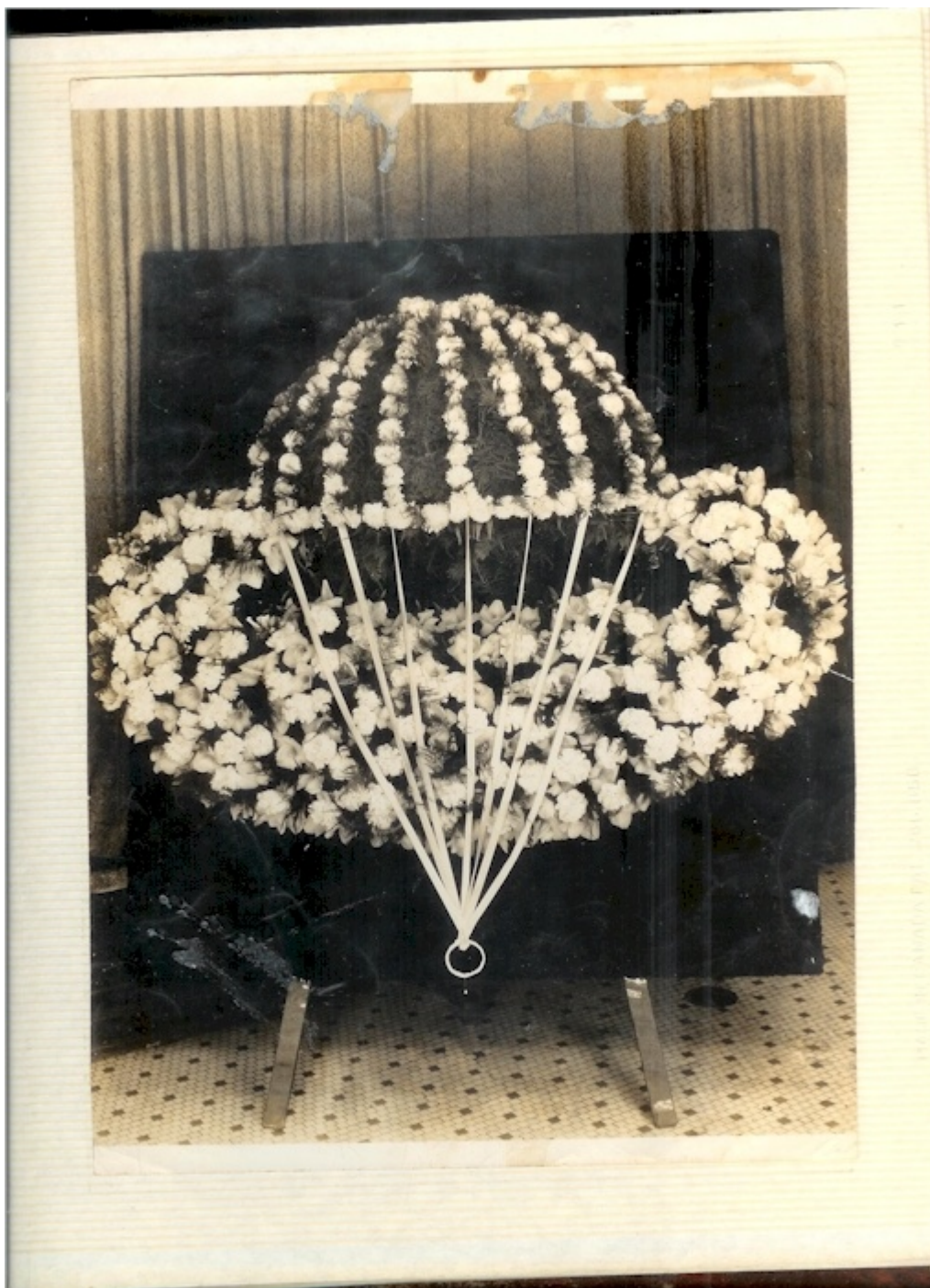
Pvt. Ellington, the father of three children, was one of five Ellington boys in the service. Mrs. Ellington died in December, 1941.

Pvt. Ellington joined the 517th Parachute Infantry when it was organized in April.

The Army pays its final tribute to Pvt. Ellington at Highland Cemetery Thursday. A bugler from Ft. Thomas will sound taps and a firing squad will fire a final volley of shots.

Pvt. Jesse Ellington, son of Mrs. Clinda Ellington, 2465 Warsaw avenue, has been graduated as an Army paratrooper at Ft. Benning, Ga. parachute school, and has been awarded his silver wings.







Jesse,

I am honestly surprised that I have not heard this story before in the unit histories, so thanks for sharing the story and the photos. I will send these out with the next MailCall newsletter, and also post them on the website soon. I am sure that I'll get some comments back.

Bob Barrett

MailCall@517prct.org

Subject: East Coast 2011 Reunion Dates

Our East Coast reunion will be held at the Ramada Hotel and Inn Gateway, January 14-18, 2011. This site has worked well for us since there are so many flights into and out of Orlando and for those driving it is just off I-4. The banquet will be held on Monday evening, January 17th. So mark your calendars. And please note that this hotel is very close to Disney World so you might consider that in your planning and encourage attendance by family members who would enjoy the experience. More information will follow but we know that many of you plan significantly ahead. (Thank you Babbie for the boot in the you know where)

For answers to specific questions contact either Brenda Verbeck
Mortensen or Helen Beddow

Brenda Verbeck
bverbeck@gmail.com

From: clairejgib@comcast.net
Sent: Wednesday, July 07, 2010 11:26 AM
To: Bob Barrett
Cc: norvest@norvest.net
Subject: Leo needs your address!

Hi, Bob -

Hope all is well. I just heard from Joanne, about the Tour de France going right past Irma's house. Who knew?

Leo needs your snail mail address, so could you send it to him at the cc here?

Thanks -

Claire

Leo,

My home address is:

Bob Barrett
27 Fuller Meadow Road
North Andover, MA 01845

How did I miss watching Stage 2 of La Tour? I knew that they started in Brussels, but didn't catch that they passed through Trois-Ponts and Stavelot on the way to Spa. That would be cool for Irma and Arnold to watch the Tour fly right by their front door.

And I know exactly the road they rode on, as I do remember seeing a sign in Stavelot pointing out a hill climb named after Eddy Merckx, probably the most famous name in cycling. I'm pretty sure that the Tour route comes down that hill that ends at the main bridge entering town from the south, then over the cobblestone bridge and up to Stavelot, passing the Chevalier's house on the left as they enter Stavelot.

Wish I was there. 2011, maybe?

Bob B.

Subject: 1973 517th Combat Team Convention memento

Hello!

I live in Milwaukee WI and have a dark wooden shadow box here that is from the 1973 convention in New Orleans.

I acquired it a few years ago from an antique dealer. I don't know if this was a gift for the attendees, or if someone made it after they returned home, as a memento.

The cubby holes in the glass-topped wall piece contain miniature items, mostly to do with the various New Orleans restaurants and their specialties. The lower left hand corner contains the invitation to the convention ball, with the date on it, and your combat teams name...that is the only way that someone can date this and know what it was about.

I don't know if anyone would like to have it... it's rather heavy with the wood and the glass...however if you find someone to whom this would mean something, I could communicate with them.

Thanks Kathy Reed (262) 502-3649

premiere@pipeline.com

Bob,

This is a great story about Audie Murphy's widow. Also I notice that Audie Murphy was awarded by the French Government their Medal of Liberated France. I dont see that award given to the 517th. Does anyone know if the unit should have received it? Also, the Belgian Croix de guerre with 1940 palm?

Lory Curtis, son of Bud Curtis, HQ, 1st BN










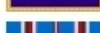




Those of us that are of a certain age surely remember Audie Murphy as a star of cowboy movies from the 50's and maybe we even know that he was the most decorated soldier in WWII. Here's an interesting tale of his widow.

Audie & Pam Murphy

Isn't it sad the media can tell us all about the crap that goes on, but ignores the GOOD people. If a movie star or politician stubs their toe we have to hear about it for days!!!






Scroll down

List of Decorations for Audie Murphy.

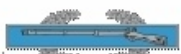
-  Medal of Honor
-  Distinguished Service Cross
-  Silver Star (with oak leaf cluster)
-  Legion of Merit
-  Bronze Star (with oak leaf cluster and Valor device)
-  Purple Heart (with two oak leaf clusters)
-  U.S. Army Outstanding Civilian Service Medal
-  U.S. Army Good Conduct Medal
-  Presidential Unit Citation (with First Oak Leaf Cluster)
-  American Campaign Medal
-  European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal (with One Silver Star, Four Bronze Service Stars (representing nine campaigns) and one Bronze Arrowhead (representing assault landing at Sicily and Southern France)),
-  World War II Victory Medal
-  Army of Occupation Medal (with Germany Clasp)
-  Armed Forces Reserve Medal

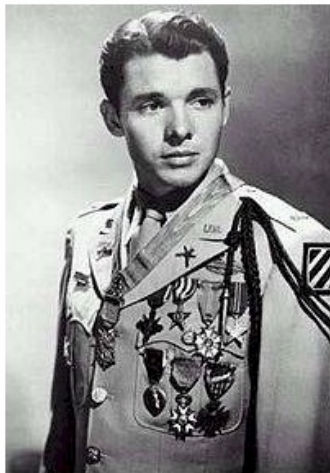


French Fourragère in Colors of the Croix de guerre

-  French Legion of Honor - Grade of Chevalier
-  French Croix de guerre (with Silver Star),
-  French Croix de guerre (with Palm)
-  Medal of Liberated France
-  Belgian Croix de guerre (with 1940 Palm)

Additionally, Murphy was awarded:

-  the [Combat Infantry Badge](#),
- [Marksman Badge](#) with Rifle Bar,
- [Expert Badge](#) with Bayonet Bar



Subject: A Great Lady Has Passed

Pamela Murphy, widow of WWII hero and actor, Audie Murphy, died peacefully at her home on April 8, 2010. She was the widow of the most decorated WWII hero and actor, Audie Murphy, and established her own distinctive 35 year career working as a patient liaison at the Sepulveda Veterans Administration hospital, treating every veteran who visited the facility as if they were a VIP.

Any soldier or Marine who came into the hospital got the same special treatment from her. She would walk the hallways with her clipboard in hand making sure her boys got to see the specialist they needed.

If they didn't, watch out. Her boys weren't Medal of Honor recipients or movie stars like Audie, but that didn't matter to Pam. They had served their country. That was good enough for her. She never called a veteran by his first name. It was always "Mister." Respect came with the job.

"Nobody could cut through VA red tape faster than Mrs. Murphy," said veteran Stephen Sherman, speaking for thousands of veterans she befriended over the years. "Many times I watched her march a veteran who had been waiting more than an hour right into the doctor's office. She was even reprimanded a few times, but it didn't matter to Mrs. Murphy. "Only her boys mattered. She was our angel."

Audie Murphy died broke in a plane crash in 1971, squandering millions of dollars on gambling, bad investments, and yes, other women. "Even with the adultery and desertion at the end, he always remained my hero," Pam told me.

She went from a comfortable ranch-style home in Van Nuys where she raised two sons to a small apartment - taking a clerk's job at the nearby VA to support herself and start paying off her faded movie star husband's debts. At first, no one knew who she was. Soon, though, word spread through the VA that the nice woman with the clipboard was Audie Murphy's widow. It was like saying General Patton had just walked in the front door. Men with tears in their eyes walked up to her and gave her a hug.

"Thank you," they said, over and over.

The first couple of years, I think the hugs were more for Audie's memory as a war hero. The last 30 years, they were for Pam.

One year I asked her to be the focus of a Veteran's Day column for all the work she had done. Pam just shook her head no.

"Honor them, not me," she said, pointing to a group of veterans down the hallway. "They're the ones who deserve it."

The vets disagreed. Mrs. Murphy deserved the accolades, they said. Incredibly, in 2002, Pam's job was going to be eliminated in budget cuts. She was considered "excess staff." "I don't think helping cut down on veterans' complaints and showing them the respect they deserve, should be considered excess staff," she told me. Neither did the veterans. They went ballistic, holding a rally for her outside the VA gates. Pretty soon, word came down from the top of the VA. Pam Murphy was no longer considered "excess staff."

She remained working full time at the VA until 2007 when she was 87.

"The last time she was here was a couple of years ago for the conference we had for homeless veterans," said Becky James, coordinator of the VA's Veterans History Project. Pam wanted to see if there was anything she could do to help some more of her boys. Pam Murphy was 90 when she died last week. What a lady.

Dennis McCarthy, Los Angeles Times on April 15, 2010 ~

I had the privilege of serving with Audie Murphy's old outfit, the 15th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division in the Korean War from 1951-52. John Eisenhower, son of Ike, also served there at the same time.

phil mc spadden

Bob,

Next month marks the 66th anniversary of the combat jump into Southern France by the 517th PRCT. Below is a letter marked TOP SECRET from Colonel Graves. The letter was read to all 517th troopers before they jumped into Southern France on August 15, 1944. Also below is a letter my Dad sent home to his mother dated August 22, 1944, describing to her his combat jump into Southern France. I sure would like to see other troopers post their experiences of that day on Mail Call if they could, or dictate to a family member of their experiences so it could be put on Mail Call. All my best to this wonderful 517th family.

Lory Curtis, son of Bud Curtis, HQ, 1st BN

TOP SECRET

HEADQUARTERS 517TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY CT
APO 758, U. S. ARMY
11 August 1944

1. The following general considerations should be noted in the operation now being undertaken.

a. For most of us this is our first combat jump. Consequently some may be a little apprehensive. Remember that the advantage is with the attacker, as the enemy does not know exactly how or when he is going to be struck. Particularly in an airborne operation in which we land in his rear areas where his CP's, lines of communication and supply echelons are set-up, will our activities give him grave concern. The enemy consequently will be a lot more apprehensive than we are. That the enemy will react to our landing by movement of forces towards our area should be expected within a few hours. However by that time we expect to be pretty well set for him and deal out a lot of punishment. It must be remembered also that he will be engaged at many other points by other airborne units and the large scale attack by the amphibious landing. There can be no doubt of the success of this operation if we use our heads and keep our confidence, work quickly but smoothly and act aggressively using good tactics and security measures.

2. As it will be dark when we first land it will be difficult to see what is going on around us. Therefore, we must not start firing promiscuously at any thing that moves. You must be certain it is the enemy before you fire. After the first unit lands many of our men will be moving around the area, some already in assembly or moving to assembly positions and others recovering bundles. Don't fire first and find it is one of your own men later. Weapons, on landing, should be loaded and locked, and fired only on orders of an officer or in case of emergency. The sound of enemy weapons is known to you and should disclose the location of enemy forces if present. Enemy flares may be fired around the area to give the appearance of enemy strength and to cause us to be alarmed. Remember that more casualties can be caused by some of our own men getting trigger happy than from enemy fire. It is possible that your stick may land some distance from the DZ. Your action in this case should be considered. The general idea is to move to your Battalion assembly area and if the Battalion has already left for its objective join them there. If this is impossible join up with friendly troops preferably of this unit and assist them in accomplishing their mission. In either case do as much damage as possible on the way, for example a staff car or a truck load of Germans may be driving along the road unaware of your presence in the area. In case no officers are present with your group the senior NCO should be prepared to take over. All men will be issued instructions regarding the terrain objectives, important towns, streams etc., and also a map in the escape kit. Remember that a few men can create a hell of a lot of trouble if they happen to be in the right place.

3. Due to lack of transport in landing and the difficulties of supply, don't expect any easy time. However, I am confident that this outfit can take care of itself in any situation that may arise. May success reward our efforts, and good hunting to each and every one of you.

R.D. Graves,

Lt. Col., 517th Prct. Inf

Commanding

Letter from Bud Curtis to his mother written on August 22, 1944.

Letter to Mom from Harland L. Curtis
Combat Jump into Southern France
August 15, 1944 as recorded by Bud on August 22, 1944

Dear Mom,

We boarded C-47's (the twin engine plane that was used by paratroopers) in Italy (Chiteviccia) about 2:30 am and had a nice pleasant ride with no opposition at all. Most of us were asleep until almost time to jump. They woke us up and said we would be over the field in eight minutes. That was about 5:00 am. We stood up and hooked up. It seemed like years went by as those last minutes ticked off. I was number 13 man. The green light came on and guys began to disappear in front of me. Then there I was at the door. I had a hell of a body position. I went out of the door like I was throwing a flying block with my right shoulder at somebody. I was heading down nose first when 'Wham' she opened and jerked me back up right. I looked up to make sure my chute was open and then I looked around. We must have jumped awfully high because I thought I was never going to come down. There was a low fog about 100 feet off the ground and it looked just like water. I really thought my number was up for sure. I was cussing the Air Corps and all their ancestors for 17 generations back.

When I sank through the mist I was just beginning to figure it all out when 'Thud' I hit the ground. I will never forget that morning. I was miles away from the jump field. Later I found out that it was a good thing I didn't land on the jump field as the Germans had it all ready for us with mines, machine guns, and flame throwers. All I could see was forms of trees through the fog. I cut myself out of my chute and when I stood up I seemed to have lost my sense of balance. I fell down and rolled down the side of a mountain a few yards. I stood up again, and did the same thing again. I stood up again and took a couple of steps and fell off a ledge about 10 feet high and about broke my neck. There was dry grass all over and every step I took you could hear it for a mile. I decided to lay still for a while and see if I could figure out where I was at. I didn't know which way to go. I heard somebody moving a little ways in front of me. I shouted the password at him hoping it was one of our guys, but instead of getting the right answer I got a couple of bullets just over my head. I took off for a big rock and figured I would have it out with the guy, but then I heard somebody behind me. Once again I made the mistake of hoping it was one of our guys and shouted the password to him and got my answer in hot lead. It was so foggy we couldn't see each other but we could hear every move each of us made.

There must have been a whale of a patrol around me and every step I took away from them I could hear them coming closer. I knew as long as it stayed foggy I could hold them off, but it began to get light and I decided the best thing to do was make a run for it and hope they would miss. I took off zig-zagging and they opened up on me, but I was lucky and got to the other side of the hill and down in the valley and there I met some of our own guys.

We climbed over another hill and came to a road and met up with most of the company. Ever since then I haven't had much trouble. In fact the Germans are running to fast. I haven't seen one for days.

Debra,

I am posting your note on the MailCall, an electronic email newsletter that we send out every week or so. (Let me know if you want to be added to this newsletter. If not, you can always read them online at www.517prct.org/mailcall)

Do you know which Company your Dad was in?

Bob Barrett

MailCall@517prct.org

Hi Bob.

Thanks for your interest and reply, my dad actually transferred into the parachute division the last year of WWII, he wore many hats while serving his country during WWII, he began as a cook, then switchboard operator, then installer-repairman for telephone and telegraph, then rifle instructor, along with armored force basic training, he continued to move up and learn while serving his country. He attended Eastern Signal Corps Schools, Ft. Monmouth New Jersey/ He has many great stories.. and tell us how he wanted to be a pilot and his commander told him he could not pass the test.. and that he himself could not pass it. however, my dad was very strong and determined and pass it with a 88. So off he went to Air Corps College Training, in Columbus, Ohio where he took basic Air Cadet Training to be a pilot, however, the program was then canceled it was then he decided to be a paratrooper and attended Parachute School at Ft. Benning, Georgia he made 22 jumps and was in Company B 517th Parachute Infantry for 1 year and was in Europe and France.. his honorable discharge and papers show Co. B 517th Prcht Inf. He still has some of his patches and pins, and medals as well, he received WWII Victory Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal, American Theater Ribbon, EAME Theater Ribbon and One Bronze Service Star, along with Sharpshooter Badge with Carbine Bar, Honorable Discharge Lapel Button WWII and unit decorations French Croix de Guerre rope. My dad told us that he was born at home, therefore, he had no birth certificate when he was in WWII and no social security number.. he tells us of a story that one day a high ranked military person called out his name one day and asked him to come with him.. they went on a jeep ride and the man kept asking him many personal questions.. finally my dad asked him what this was all about. he could not remember the exact name but. he was from intelligence division. they thought he was a spy.. since he had no birth certificate, or s.s. number, and had made it through several areas in the army and still alive. I guess they began to wonder.. he was only 19 or 20 years old. He is now 86 years.. and very proud of him and all he has done for our country.. he has told us. he was very lucky to come back alive.after 22 jumps back then. and tells us that he was number 13th..as no one wanted to be the 13th jumper.

We would appreciate any information or contacts from anyone that may have knew him..and thanks so much for what you do. it means so much to the families..

Debra Schneider
Kerens, Tx.

Hi

I'm the daughter of Louis A. Rennick, he served WWII B-517th. this is the first contact made on your site. He is 86 years and has recently began telling me stories. So just getting started, please add his name to any lists and let me know how I can get information or contacts out to anyone from his unit left. Thanks so much to all of you!!!

Debra Schneider, Daughter of Louis A. Rennick

kyann@hughes.net

Corsicana, Texas
903-396-7308

Name that Trooper

Name that Trooper will return in the next MailCall

Administrivia:

- If you miss any MailCalls, they are all available online at <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/>
- At any time, if you want to be added or removed from the MailCall list, just let me know.
- Donations for any programs involving the 517th should be sent to our treasurer Leo Dean at 14 Stonehenge Lane, Albany NY 12203.
- New address for MailCall: MailCall@517prct.org
- If you send me email that you do not want included in MailCall, just label it as FYEO.
- I now understand how Ben could get confused about what he already posted and what he didn't. If I miss something, please just send it again.