



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

## MailCall No. 2013

September 18, 2010

*517th Parachute Infantry Regiment  
460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion  
596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company*

Website  
Mail Call  
Mail Call Archives  
Roster

[www.517prct.org](http://www.517prct.org)  
[MailCall@517prct.org](mailto:MailCall@517prct.org)  
[www.517prct.org/archives](http://www.517prct.org/archives)  
[www.517prct.org/roster.pdf](http://www.517prct.org/roster.pdf)

### *Welcome back, Howard*

From: Steve Markle

Howard,

Hal and I were so sorry to hear of your "door attack". We are so happy that you are up and going again, and most of all, your wonderful contributions to the 517th and Mail Call. We still recall our wonderful time with you and Jan at the Savannah Reunion. Much love and good health to you.

Helen and Hal Beddow

---

Dear Bob:

This is for Howard Hensleigh --

Dear Howard: you are a most amazing human being. Alan and I were so sorry to hear about your catastrophe. Having said that we are awed by your amazing resilience, fortitude, bravery and courage. Glad to see you back in full force. As we said, you are truly amazing. How blessed we all are for your friendship, leadership, and vision (so say nothing of your great talents as a wit, writer and legal legend). May your guardian angel continue to look out for you. Thanks for the stories.

Pat Seitz and Alan Greer



## *MailCall News*

From: **Rita Kramer**, daughter of **Harlon Roberts**  
Sent: Saturday, August 28, 2010 7:29 PM  
To: Steve Markle

Subject: Re: can you scan photos? and a link to interview coming

OK I will get them out to you within a few weeks. I will ask my brother what company Dad was in - he knows more of the details. Dad never told us kids much of the war, but he did tell my brothers more than me - I was his little girl and he never spoke of the war to me. Thank you for your help.

---

Sent: Saturday, September 11, 2010 8:00 PM  
To: Rita

1st of all... thanks for sharing. There are some GEMS in this collection of pictures. Unfortunately none of these are related to the 517th.

Let me explain.... I was able to confirm that your Dad was with the 517 as part of Company C in WWII as of December 1943 (the "Christmas Roster" ([http://www.517prct.org/documents/xmas1944/christmas\\_1944\\_searchable.pdf](http://www.517prct.org/documents/xmas1944/christmas_1944_searchable.pdf)) as a private..... These pictures actually predate that. This appears to be a photo and memory album from a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in 1941.

These groups were established by FDR to put young men to work in the depression on meaningful work. They are credited with building the infrastructure for many of the State and National Parks. They were run by the Army, with directions on the projects by the National Park Service. They also were structured like being in the Military.

Specifically, this appears to be Camp 15 in the State of Pennsylvania, and supported/ran by what appears to be an Army Air Corp unit, and some kind of affiliation with the 188th Parachute Infantry Regiment. I found this site on the 'Net about the efforts of the CCC in Pennsylvania;

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/history/historycccyyears.aspx> and  
<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/ccc/index.aspx>

I will return these pictures to you early next week along with CD's of the scans of these wonderful pictures. I would suggest if you do not keep the pictures that they are submitted to the PA Historical Society related to the CCC (with an extra CD that I will include) for their use..... and keep the CD for family use.

Hopefully you will enjoy the results.

-Steve-



From: Rita KRAMER  
Sent: Tuesday, September 14, 2010 6:46 PM  
To: Steve Markle  
Subject: Re: Some Answers to your photos...

Thank you so much for the wealth of information and your time to scan and save the pictures. We had no idea that Dad was in such a camp. How interesting. . . . .

Thanks again for taking the time to inform our family. I do have pictures of Dad jumping for the 517 - but I think my brother has them - I will try to dig them up and scan them for you.

Thanks Again

Rita

---

Subject: Re: Some Answers to your photos...

Thanks for the response. The pleasure was all mine... I love the history in these types of images.

Unfortunately I forgot the envelope when I headed out Monday morning to the bay area on business (I live in the Sacramento area), so it will not go into the mail until Thursday.... I really think you'll be surprised with some of the scanned images.... digital darkrooms are great.

Please copy Bob Barrett with any of the pictures that you have scanned of your father in the 517 years... he will get them posted to the 517 site.

Take care...

-Steve-





*517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team*





---

From: Steve Markle

I was looking up to see if there was further information on your Dad on the 517 site... and there was on this page;

[http://www.517prct.org/517\\_links.htm](http://www.517prct.org/517_links.htm) directing to this link  
<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wvmarsha/rww2bios.htm>

...but the link is now dead. Fortunately I found the same article here;

<http://www.lindapages.com/marshall/rww2bios.htm>

Bob,,,, can you update the link on the 517 site or get a PDF of the article?

-Steve-

---

Steve,

Thanks for the info. I did make the change of the URL link on the web site. And I saved a copy of the page, as I have learned to do, since eventually many articles on outside sources just disappear or move. So I am now saving our own copies, just in case.

I hope to get the photos and your conversations with Rita into the next MailCall.

Thanks,

Bob Barrett



*Callian and the 141<sup>st</sup>  
Follow up on Howard Hensleigh's first hand account*

From: Gilles Guignard  
Sent: Sunday, September 12, 2010 3:59 AM  
To: Bob Barrett; H. Hensleigh 517th  
Subject: Callian and the 141st - Follow up on Howard Hensleigh's first hand account

The unit of the 141st which attacked Callian was called Task Force Eitt; it was commanded by Major Herbert E. Eitt who was the XO of 2/141.

This motorized Task Force consisted of Company B and Company I, 141st Infantry with two sections of Heavy Machine Guns, a section of 81mm mortars, a mine squad from the Anti Tank Company, a reconnaissance platoon and a platoon of B Company, 636th Tank Destroyer Bn.

The mission of the Task Force was to "attack Callian, release the paratroopers who were trapped and then proceed on to attacking Fayence."

The Task Force was organized following an order of Division chief of staff at 1705 on August 18th.

I have more details about the attack if it is of interest.

Kind regards, Gilles

---

Dear Gilles

Thanks. I am interested as I spoke with the regimental commander the afternoon before the attack and was with non-attacking elements of the 141st the night of the night attack. Longo and I went into Callian early the next morning when there were only spots of German resistance left in the town. My guess is that some of the Germans were left in pockets in buildings that were bypassed during the night attack. They still gave us some trouble, but the town was occupied by the 141st. By then, as I soon learned, our jump casualties had been moved to Montauroux. I was as surprised as the 141st at learning this.

Incidentally, Joe McGeever who drove through German lines, picked up his jump casualties and drove back during the night, gave me hell because I did not get back to the outfit as soon as he did. If he didn't recognize my job turned out to be a little more complicated than his turned out to be, I didn't try to educate him. What is most important is that both of us succeeded in getting the injured troopers from behind German lines to a US field hospital without loss or casualty.

Did the task force proceed to attack Feyence? I do not recall that the 141st liberated Feyence.

Howard Hensleigh



### *Website Guestbook Entry*

Submitted by	Comments:
Name: <b>Tony Patin</b> From: Breaux Bridge, La E-mail: <a href="mailto:tpatin@ardent.us">tpatin@ardent.us</a>	My father <b>Thomas Fred Patin</b> was a member of the Fighting 517. He didn't talk very much about those times, but since he has passed I've become interested in some of the hardships that he and his comrades had to endure. If anyone has any information about my father, please share it with me, Thanks.
	Added: September 15, 2010

### *Arland Schneider's Trip Report*

Hi, Bob -

Please see below and attached. Please put below and attached on Mail Call and the website if possible, per his request.

Gee, I wish your dad could read this....sigh....I do so miss him.

Hugs to you and thanks of course -

Claire

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject: Arland Schneider's Trip Report

Claire,

The report of my two-day trip to the Rhone American Cemetery and the French Maritime Alps is attached. The attachment is in MS Word 97-2003 with a file size slightly larger than 800 kilobytes.

Hopefully, you can place the report on your web site. Maybe it will refresh the memory of veterans who knew Richard Bednarz. If someone wants to contact me they can do so by e-mail or with the phone number or APO mailing address below.

Arland

Arland D. Schneider

Mail: CMR 457, Box 653, APO AE 09033

Residence: Henneberg Strasse 11, 97453 Mainberg-Schonungen GERMANY

Home Phone: 09721-978-9751 (From U.S. 011+49+9721-978-9750)

Cell Phone: 0151-2056-5026 (From U.S. 011+49+151-2056-5026)

-- Trip Report is attached to the end of this 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.
- Send any news, stories, or feedback to: [MailCall@517prct.org](mailto: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.
- Donations for any programs involving the 517th should be sent to our treasurer:  
Leo Dean  
14 Stonehenge Lane  
Albany, NY 12203

***Save the date!***

**Annual 517th Reunion (probably the last one)**

**July 13-18, 2011  
Atlanta, GA**

**with visits to Camp Toccoa and Fort Benning**





## Visits to the Military Grave and Last Battle Site of Richard B. Bednarz<sup>1</sup>

This is a report of my visits to the grave of Richard B. Bednarz at the Rhone American Cemetery and to the location in the French Maritime Alps where he was most likely killed in action. To begin, I am summarizing information I have about Richard's family and military service.

### Richard B. Bednarz

Richard B. Bednarz (Service Number 18104461) entered the Army as a volunteer from DeWitt County, TX - probably from the City of Cuero. My older cousins remember him being stationed in Georgia, so he probably trained at Camp Toccoa, GA as an original member of the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment. While in the Army he married a woman named Margaret on 3 Oct 1943, and probably adopted her daughter named Charlene. His father, August Bednarz, worked at numerous locations in South Texas for the Southern Pacific Railroad. After Richard's parents divorced, his mother, Dovie Bailey, married Jesse Park, the owner of a dry cleaning business in Cuero. Richard's brother, Robert or Morris, was too young for military service during WWII.

After the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment completed parachute training, it added an artillery battalion and an engineer company and became the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team. Richard was a member of the Regimental Headquarters Company. He saw combat in Italy and then participated in Operation Dragoon to liberate Southern France and join forces with General Patton's Third Army to the North. He safely completed the parachute drop on 15 Aug 1944, but was later killed in action on 21 Sep 1944. Richard is buried at the Rhone American Cemetery in Draguignan, France (Near Nice). Additional information about Richard's death may be available from the Quartermaster Graves Registration records now known as the Individual Deceased Personnel File. I have not been able to obtain this file and searching is difficult because many of the records seem to have been moved recently.

According to 517<sup>th</sup> regimental histories, their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions secured Col de Braus, a mountain pass in the Maritime Alps, on 18 Sep 1944 with successful attacks on both Hill 1098 and Tete de la

Lavina, Figure 1. About the same time, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion captured the town of Peira Cava about six kilometers to the north. After capturing Col de Braus and Peira Cava, the 517<sup>th</sup> mainly held defensive positions for the next five weeks. Richard was killed in action on 21 Sep 1944 so he probably died at or near one of these two locations even though the 517<sup>th</sup> command post was at l'Escarene.

### Rhone American Cemetery

After flying from Frankfurt, Germany to Nice, France on the morning of 10 Aug 2010, I rented a car and drove to Draguignan, the location of the Rhone American Cemetery. The cemetery is beautiful and well maintained, and I was warmly wel-



Figure 1. Location of the 517<sup>th</sup>'s advance into the Maritime Alps [Adapted from Archer, 1985].



Figure 1. Arland Schneider at the grave site of Richard B. Bednarz.

<sup>1</sup> By Arland D. Schneider, a first cousin of Richard B. Bednarz from his father's family.

comed by the staff to include Geoffrey Fournier, the superintendent of the cemetery. He and his assistant went with me to the grave site, provided flags, and helped me take photographs as shown in Figure 2. The French Army was a major participant in the Rhone Valley Campaign, and their flag is included in the photograph. The French Army, equal in numbers to the American forces, liberated the coastal areas of Southern France and secured the deepwater ports of Toulon and Marseilles nearly four months before British forces secured the port of Antwerp, Belgium. The French Resistance participated in the fighting and provided order and security for newly liberated areas, thus relieving the U.S. forces of occupation duty.

In addition to assisting me at the cemetery, Mr. Fournier drove me to a French memorial within Draguignan marking the location where American paratroopers advancing from the south met up with the French Resistance advancing from the north. He also provided valuable information about the origin of the Rhone American Cemetery and operation of the other American cemeteries in Europe. The cemetery guest register showed that the vast majority of cemetery visitors are French. The remaining visitors are mostly from other foreign countries with only a small minority being from the U.S.

In WWII, fallen soldiers were typically buried quickly on the battlefield and later reburied in numerous temporary cemeteries. Burials at the Rhone American Cemetery may have been different. The cemetery was opened only four days after the campaign began, and much of the military action occurred near the cemetery. As a result, some battlefield burials may have been at the cemetery, and the Draguignan cemetery may have been used for burials normally done at temporary cemeteries. In 1947, after bodies had been identified, families were given the option of having the bodies returned to the U.S. at government expense for burial in family plots or having them buried permanently in overseas military cemeteries. According to Mr. Fournier, 69% of the bodies identified in Europe were returned to the U.S. for burial. Service men and women who could not be identified were buried in the European cemeteries. In addition, the "Missing" are commemorated in memorials at these cemeteries. I have no information about the decision to leave Richard's body at the Rhone American Cemetery rather than having it returned to the U.S. When this decision was made and by whom may be provided in his Individual Deceased Personnel File if it still exists.



**Figure 2. View of the cemetery and memorial from Richard B. Bednarz's grave.**

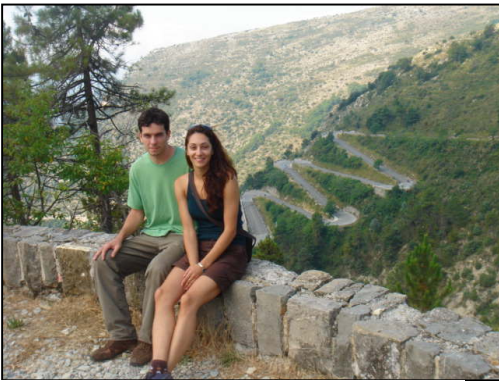
Figure 3 provides another view of the cemetery with the Memorial in the background and one of fifty olive trees to the left. Rhone is the smallest of the American cemeteries in Europe with only 861 graves - sixty two of them being the graves of "Unknowns." A Wall of the Missing lists the names of an additional 294 missing Americans. Information about the Rhone American Cemetery is readily available on American Battle Monuments Commission web site, [www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov).

After visiting the cemetery, I checked into the Hotel Victoria Draguignan for two nights. Fortunately, the hotel manager spoke English, and he recommended a really good French restaurant where the manager and some of the staff also

spoke English. In general, my visit was pleasant, and the French people were friendly even though I know only a few words of French.

### **French Maritime Alps**

The next day, I traveled to the Col de Braus and Peira Cava areas in the Maritime Alps where Richard's regiment was fighting when he was killed in action. During this trip, I was greatly assisted by Jean-Loup Gassend, a young man from Villeneuve-Loubet near Nice. He and his girl friend, Nina Kolaric visiting



**Figure 4. Jean-Loup Gassend and Nina Kolaric with the winding road to Col de Braus in the background.**

from Croatia, are shown in Figure 4. Figure 5 shows American soldiers possibly from the 517<sup>th</sup> traveling the same route with the winding road in the background. I came to know Jean-Loup through my volunteer work supervisor, Brad

Posey, in Schweinfurt. Brad spends many weekends searching WWI battlefield



**Figure 5. American troops driving to Col de Braus with the winding road in the background [De Trez, 1998].**

sites in France for battlefield artifacts. Jean-Loup is a serious student of WWII and recently completed a thesis about his field explorations in the Maritime Alps. He is continuing to collect information for a book about the American units that fought in this area - one of the units being the 517<sup>th</sup>. While searching for artifacts in the mountains, he discovered a mass German grave and helped German authorities identify the soldiers and their units. He has also visited the Stalingrad (now Volgograd) and the Al Alamein battlefields to collect artifacts and information.

Going north from Nice we stopped at l'Escarene (Figure 1) to visit two French memorials. The most interesting contained the bodies of 86 French soldiers killed in WWII. Late in the war, the French Army attacked the remaining German forces in the French Alps and parts of northern Italy and lost about 200 men killed in the action. According to Jean-Loup, the percentage of men buried at the memorial versus the percent sent back to families is typical of the military cemeteries he has studied. Some families want their dead relatives to remain with their comrades in arms. Other soldiers have no family to claim their body, or conflicts or disinterest prevent their families from wanting their bodies returned. For example, some names on the French monument were of French Colonial troops from Algeria and French Morocco, and these soldiers likely had no family to claim their bodies.

After leaving l'Escarene, we started the winding trip up the mountains to Col de Braus. We made several stops along the way to compare present day views with photographs in a book [De Trez, 1998] showing soldiers of the 517<sup>th</sup> in action. At one location, Jean-Loup showed me photographs where the Germans had literally blown a section of the road off the side of the mountain. According to the regimental histories, the engineer company drilled tie-backs into the mountain and tied a new road to the mountain completing the work in only seven days. The climate is quite dry and pieces of shrapnel, barbed wire, battlefield debris, and some unexploded artillery shells are well preserved. I was really surprised that military artifacts like this would remain untouched for 66 years.

### **Col De Braus**

Col De Braus is actually a mountain pass on the road from Nice to Sospel rather than a town or village. Militarily it was controlled by a hill named Hill 1098 (in meters) to the north and Tete de la Lavina to the south. The only building to survive the American and German shelling is shown in Figure 6. All other buildings were destroyed, and only one new building has been added. Figure 7 illustrates what the building looked like in 1944 when the 517<sup>th</sup> controlled the area. The numerous shrapnel holes in the older photo have been repaired, but the repairs are noticeable beneath the paint.

Hill 1098 to the north was captured and held by the 517<sup>th</sup> on 18 Sep 1944. We drove to the top of the mountain on a gravel road where we could look down on the City of Sospel and Mount Agaisen, a Ma-



Figure 6. Arland Schneider at Col de Braus.

shrapnel and other wartime debris. Jean-Loup said he once used a metal detector on the hilltop, and it rang nearly everywhere indicating a solid cover of shrapnel.

Maginot Line fort held by the Germans when the 517<sup>th</sup> occupied the hill. The mountain top is still covered with



Figure 7. Men of the 517<sup>th</sup> in 1944 using the single standing building at Col de Braus [De Trez, 1998].

After returning to Col de Braus, we drove in the opposite direction on a gravel road to the top of Tete de la Lavina. This mountain top, also captured by the 517<sup>th</sup> on 18 Sep 1944, afforded an even better view of Sospel and Mount Agaisen. Gun turrets of the Maginot Line fort could be raised out of concrete bunkers for firing and then lowered back into the bunkers for reloading. Weeks of artillery fire by the smaller caliber American artillery never significantly damaged the forts.



Figure 8. Arland Schneider standing in an old foxhole with the crest of Tete de la Lavina in the background.

The foxhole in which I am standing in Figure 8 was used by the Germans or the Americans, or perhaps by both. Digging foxholes in the rocky soil ranged from difficult to impossible, and neither the Germans nor Americans developed any WWI type trenches. The ground here is still thick with shrapnel, and the remains of several German bunkers are located along the west side of the mountain facing the direction of the advancing 517<sup>th</sup>. Interestingly, the German bunkers consisted of a heavy, prefabricated, corrugated metal roof covered with soil and rocks.

### Peira Cava

From Col de Braus, we travel north over another mountain road to the town of Peira Cava which was captured by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 517<sup>th</sup>. This town did not have the strategic importance of Col de Braus and was not subjected to the amount of shelling and counter attacks as Col de Braus. The town contains buildings from a pre WWII French Army garrison that is no longer in use.



Figure 9. Present day view of a former French Army garrison at Peira Cava.

Figure 9 illustrates some of the garrison buildings, and Figure 10 illustrates how they looked in 1944.



Figure 10. American troops using the Peira Cava French Army garrison in 1944 [De Trez, 1998]

The buildings are now mostly abandoned with numerous broken windows and a hole in the roof of the smaller building.

### **Jean-Loup's Museum**

After lunch in Peira Cava, we returned to Jean-Loup's home in Villeneuve-Loubet to view his private



**Figure 11. Artifacts from the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team.**

WWII museum. The display case in Figure 11 contains his 517<sup>th</sup> items, and the helmet to the left has special significance. Jean-Loup obtained it from French man in the mountains, and it contained the name of a veteran of the 517<sup>th</sup>. With the help of the 517<sup>th</sup>'s organization, Jean-Loup was able to contact the owner, Marvin Moles. Mr. Moles returned in 2004 for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Sospel, authenticated his helmet, and left it in Jean-Loup's museum.

After leaving Jean-Loup's house, I returned to Draguignan for the night. The following morning I planned to visit the French National Artillery Museum at Draguignan, but the museum was closed for the day. Instead, I returned to the American cemetery to take additional photographs and spent some time driving through the French countryside. The area of the Operation Dragoon parachute drop is primarily vineyards with an occasional winery. These vineyards probably look similar to the way they looked in 1944. About noon, I returned to the Nice airport, took a mid-afternoon return flight to Frankfurt, and then drove home to Schweinfurt, Germany.

### **Concluding Remarks**

My research of the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team and my trips to the Rhone American Cemetery and to the Maritime Alps battle sites were exciting and rewarding experiences. I especially appreciate the information and support provided by Brad Posey as I planned my trip. Without his encouragement, I likely would not have attempted to visit all the battle sites. Similarly, my trip to the cemetery in Draguignan would not have been as complete without the information provided by Geoffrey Fournier, and my trip to the Maritime Alps would not have been as extensive or successful without the assistance and guidance of Jean-Loup Gassend.

The family history information obtained during my research and trip has been limited, however. In the future, I will hopefully obtain information from Richard's Individual Deceased Personnel File. This trip report will be posted on the Web site of the 517<sup>th</sup> Organization, and surviving members of the 517<sup>th</sup> may provide information about Richard's army experience. If more information becomes available, I will provide it to those who receive this trip report.

### **References**

Archer, Clark, *Paratroopers Odyssey: A History of the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Team*, 266p, 1985 (Available online).

Astor, Gerald, *Battling Buzzards': The Odyssey of the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team 1943-1945*, 338 p, Donald I. Fine Pub, 1993.

De, Trez, Michel, *First Airborne Task Force: Pictorial History of the Allied Paratroopers in the Invasion of Southern France*, 505p, 1998.

<http://www.abmc.gov> (Web site of the American Battle Monuments Commission).

<http://www.517prct.org/> (Web site of the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team Organization).