



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2029

December 23, 2010

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

Website

www.517prct.org

Mail Call

MailCall@517prct.org

Mail Call Archives

www.517prct.org/archives

Roster

www.517prct.org/roster.pdf

Christmas 1944

With all of the Christmas rush I forgot to mention I received my Thunderbolt. What a great issue. I get so excited every time I receive it. I tell myself I will read it later, but never have been able to. I immediately stop what I am doing and sit down and read it cover to cover. Thank you Helen and Claire so much for your hard Outstanding work on each Thunderbolt. You two are wonderful!

I am getting ready to go to California and visit my Mom for Christmas eve. My brother Tim and I go see her every Christmas eve since my Dad passed. Since I will probably not get back on MailCall this year, I want to wish each of our 517th family members a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I am very mindful of the hardships each trooper was going through on December 25, 1944, and want to say thank you so very much for your selfless service in the most difficult times of the war. My Dad would tell me it was usually about 20 degrees below zero at night. I asked him how he stayed warm. He said you never stopped moving. I am just amazed at the toughness you paratroopers had to be able to fight in such adverse conditions. I remember talking with Melvin Biddle telling me about his experiences being in a frozen foxhole. He told me he was so worried about his trigger finger freezing and not being able to pull the trigger he stayed awake all night. I have included a picture of soldiers fighting in these snowy conditions from the National Archives to remind us all what these great men did for us.

I hope each of us are warm and cozy for a wonderful Christmas this year. Merry Christmas to All!

Lory Curtis, son of Bud Curtis, HQ 1st Bn.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Christmas Greetings

Nous vous souhaitons un Joyeux Noël !

Patricia et Roland

We wish you a Merry Xmas !

Patricia and Roland



Wishing the 517th and their families a Very Merry Christmas and all the best in the New Year.

Cheers,

Paul Abbene





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

To: Mailcall@517prct.org

Subject: Love from Belgium

Dear friends of America, We think of each of you, our heroes and we send our best wishes. The merriest of greetings hoping Christmas brings you all the special happiness that you could wish it to.

With Love and Gratitude.

Maria Gaspar, Arnold and Irma Targnion and members of CADUSA (US airborne Reception Committee)

Annual ceremonies on 2011 jan 8th with a Holy Mass in St Jacques Church and homage and flowers at the 517th Monuments



Guestbook Entries

Submitted by

Name: **Richard Simcoe**
From: Charlotte, NC
E-mail: richsimcoe@earthlink.net

Comments:

My brother-in-law, **Robert A. Button**, was in the 517th. He passed away Dec 2, 2010. His discharged papers indicated he received the Silver Star and the Bronze Metal. The Bronze he received was for his actions in the operation at de Muy, France. Does anyone remember him. If so, I would appreciate hearing about it.

Added: December 22, 2010



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

MailCall News

To: mailcall@517prct.org
Subject: please add me to the list

Oneil72@gmail.com **Charlie O'Neil**

[Charlie is the son of Donald "Don" O'Neil of the 596th. – BB]

Subject: Comment posted on "517th PRCT celebration in Sospel France 2009 - part 2 of 3"
[formuladave](#) has made a comment on [517th PRCT celebration in Sospel France 2009 - part 2 of 3](#):
Great video of the vets. Thank you for posting. My father-in-law, **Herbert Downs** was in H
Company.

From: Gilles Guignard [mailto:dogface44@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, December 20, 2010 3:33 AM
To: Bob Barrett
Subject: Mailcall 2028

Dear Bob,

Following Davis Hausvater's request for details about uniforms during Operation Dragoon, here are a few:

- All sorts of uniforms were worn by the 517th PRCT in Southern France, including M-1943 jackets, HBT's and of course the M-1942 jumpsuit
- If you look at the color pictures of Bill Boyle for example, he is wearing an M-1943 jacket and regular OD wool pants.
- Most uniforms were spray camouflaged as well as the personal gear in Light Green and Black and sometimes with some tan color added. (Not the same camo colors as the pathfinders in Normandy)
- Boots: Regular Jump Boots and the new M-1943 Combat Boots aka "Buckle Boots".
- Helmets: standard fixed bales or M2 "D-Bales" - all with 517th modified chinstrap and camo. Nets were the small mesh vehicle type nets.
- The 517th did not wear any patch on the combat uniforms in Southern France, except for a cut out oilcloth invasion armband which was sewn on the upper left sleeve.

You will find valuable info about the 517th uniforms here:
http://www.517prct.org/documents/militaria_517th_prct_article_final.pdf

And you might enjoy seeing our reenactment pictures taken last August in Southern France:
<http://www.usmilitariaforum.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=89526>

Kind regards and Merry Christmas to all the friends of the 517th,

Gilles



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Dear Howard and Mr Barret,

Good to know that you're doing fine!

I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy but above all healthy New Year!

Capt Woodhull, and all those others men that fought for our freedom, deserve our dedication. It's the least we can do to show our gratitude.

Howard, please send me your address there is something I want to send to you.

Best regards

Ronald Stassen

From: sergeantmom [mailto:sergeantmom@davispc.com]

Sent: Wednesday, December 22, 2010 12:45 AM

To: webmaster@517prct.org

Subject: Sorry to Bother You, but...

Sorry to bother you but I'm looking for information on a relative ... **Harrison William Soots**, born 1905. He sort of disappeared after WWII and we've been trying to reconstruct his life. He joined the Army on 27 Jan 1944 at the ripe old age of 39, and apparently volunteered to jump. He ended up in G Co, 3rd Bn, 517th Prcht Inf Regt., and shows up on your web site as a private in G Co on the 517th's 1944 Christmas in France List. I know he survived because I found him on a transport roster as a PFC, still with Co G, on the Madawaska Victory, departing from France for New York on 20 Aug 1945.

I searched your site for more information for Co G on your page showing the excerpt from the 13th Airborne Division in WWII book, but it sadly cut off after HQ Company. I followed your link to the CIB Military Media site which still advertises having reprints of the book for sale. I ordered a copy of the book on 20 December and paid with PayPal. Within 24 hours I received an email from PayPal indicating the \$63.42 had been recredited to my credit card with the following message from CIB Military Media:

Merchant information

CIB Military Media

dean@cibmedia.com

<https://www.cibmedia.com>

415-246-4665

Note from merchant

Hi- The book your ordered is out of stock and now out of print. Our profound apologies!

www.cibmedia.com

All I really want is a copy of the remainder of the information on G Co. Could whoever scanned the first part of the 517th for your website please scan the remainder of the 517th for me. I'd gladly pay him or her for the service.

Thank you for your assistance and patience.

Sincerely,

Master Sergeant Dolores Rose Esch-Coop
U.S. Army, Retired



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Dolores,

Interesting story. I would think that the G Company soldiers would remember Private Soots, then, since that age would make him one of the oldest members of the 517th. (My Dad turned 26 in 1944, and he always claimed to be one of the older members of the Regiment.)

I will post your inquiries on the next weekly MailCall email, and see if any of the vets from G Company remember him. Unfortunately, there are not many (any?) G Co vets on the MailCall circulation list, but often these requests also get printed in their Thunderbolt newsletter, which gets printed a couple of times per year, and gets to a wider audience.

Regarding the 13th Airborne book, I have a copy that I just checked. Unfortunately, you won't find anything more there. The remainder of the 517th section is just photos, and none of them identify any specific soldiers. The better histories are the "Paratroopers' Odyssey", which is often available on eBay, but is also reprinted in full on the website. See: http://517prct.org/documents/odyssey/odyssey_history.htm And there is also "The Battling Buzzards" by Gerald Astor. See: http://517prct.org/books.htm#517th_Books

You have reminded me that there are additional pages in the 13th Airborne to be scanned. I will remember to get to that.

Do you have any photos or other information about Private Soots? If you do, I would be pleased to post those photos or stories on the website.

Regards,

Bob Barrett

No. I wish we had a picture of him. I have a picture of his son and of his brothers, but not of him. The Soots' were Germans; the first ones immigrated to America during the American Revolution as Prussian Soldiers. A lot of them served in the military over the years.

Most of the Soots men were tall, strong, farmboys ... over 6 feet tall. They generally had brown hair and brown eyes. Harrison had a nickname ... it was Hack. I don't know where the nickname came from. There is one other thing. Harrison had a son, also named Harrison; Harrison junior enlisted before Harrison senior. There is no birth record for a "Harrison William Soots" in Indiana for 1905 ... but there is a record of birth for "William Harrison Soots," all the brothers, and all the sisters. In fact, William Harrison Soots ceased to exist on record the day Harrison William Soots began showing up on record. References to the number of boys in later obituaries were always one short, whether they mentioned Harrison or not.

We believe now that Harrison William was William Harrison. Harrison wasn't 38 ... 3 months short of 39 ... when he enlisted. He was 41 ... 3 months short of 42. He lied about his age to get in the Army.

Harrison didn't go home to Kokomo, Indiana after the war. His mom's obituary mentions him as still living, but with address unknown. His oldest brother's obituary indicated Harrison was in Pennsylvania. When the next brother died, the obituary indicated he was in Kokomo. His remaining two brothers' obituaries indicated that he died before them, but we haven't discovered where he was when he passed on.

That's all I have. I wish there was more.

I'm trying to dig up all I can on him for his granddaughter. Harrison junior passed away a few years ago, and she wants to know about her grandpa now.



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I'm usually pretty good with researching obscure military history. It shouldn't be this difficult when the veteran is in my own family.

I've looked at the other books you've mentioned. I didn't see him mentioned in there. Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Master Sergeant Dolores Rose Esch-Coop
U.S. Army, Retired

From: MJ Devaney [mailto:mjdevaney1@hotmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, December 23, 2010 9:22 PM
To: mailcall@517prct.org
Subject: Request to update email

Good evening,

Could you please add me to your mail call?

mjdevaney1@hotmail.com

Thank you.

[THE DIGITAL STORY OF THE NATIVITY](#)

How social media, web and mobile tell the story of the Nativity. Christmas story told through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, Wikipedia, Google Maps, Gmail, ...

Remembering Melvin "Bud" Biddle

At the 517th Reunion,
Washington DC, 2007





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Remembering Melvin "Bud" Biddle

Hello Bob,

I am saddened to hear of the passing of **Melvin "Bud" Biddle**. I was so honored when I got to meet him during the 517th reunion in Washington D.C. I was with **Morris McDowell** at the time and took a great picture of the two of them (attached). I took several more pictures around the WWII memorial area and also got one of myself standing with him. Those pictures and the memories that my family and I have will always be treasured. My condolences to his family!



S.O.B.

Rick Sweet

Thanks Bob for putting out Mail Call #2028 shortly after #2027 regarding Mel Biddle. **Hunter McDonald** called me and told me that NBC had a segment on Mel and his Metal of Honor and his passing. By the time I got in touch with you, you had all information.

How do we honor such a great man like Mel? It seems as if everything has been said by the many people that wrote into Mail Call. I talked to him on the phone every year for at least the last 10 years. I kept asking him to attend our Reunions. I finally got to spend some time with him at the Washington Reunion. In all this time he never mentioned his Metal of Honor unless I asked him to speak. His answer was that he was not a hero, no more than the other 517 Troopers.

Without a doubt he was a great man, very humble and a true friend even though I did not know him during the War. It was my good fortunate to be able to talk with him through the years.

Darrell Egner



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Bob,

My heart is saddened to hear of the passing of Melvin "Bud" Biddle. In June 2007, just before going to the Washington D.C. reunion I was in Indiana visiting family. I was only a few hours away from Anderson Indiana, and decided I would telephone Mr. Biddle. I told him who I was and if it would be possible to come visit him. Mr. Biddle didn't know who I was, only that I said I was the son of a 517th trooper. Without hesitation Mr. Biddle said yes please come over.

With my brother in law we drove to Anderson Indiana and there I knocked on the door of Mr. Biddle's home. He came to the door and graciously shook our hands and welcomed us in. He was still suffering from recent open heart bypass surgery, and I thought for a moment that we would just talk for a few minutes at the door and be on our way. But I felt our visit was important to him. We visited for at least 2 hours. He was such a wonderful, gracious host. He told us all about what he did to receive the Medal of Honor. Both my brother in law and I were combat veterans of Viet Nam so we listened intently to what he had to tell us. We knew we were truly in the presence of a real American Hero.

Later, I believe Mr. Biddle told us he was traveling on a train after being wounded and read in the Stars and Strips Newspaper that he was receiving the Medal of Honor. When he got to Washington, D.C., the Army gave him a uniform with Corporal strips on it to wear for the ceremony. He told us he was only a P.F.C. and then he said once he left meeting with the President the Army took the uniform with the Corporal strips away from him and made him a P.F.C. again. I remember he still seemed upset about that in 2007. He also told us that the President leaned over and whispered in his ear that he would rather have the Medal of Honor than be President, and asked him if he would like to trade.

While we were visiting with Mr. Biddle he left the room and returned with his Medal of Honor. I had seen individuals with the Medal of Honor before, but never have I had a recipient of the Medal hand it to me and let me hold it. It was and will be one of the greatest honors of my life. Then Mr. Biddle went and got a copy of the recent Medal of Honor book that was written about all those living recipients. He autographed the book for me on his page, and gave me the book with pictures of him receiving the medal. I then took pictures of him and I, we shook hands again, and said goodbye.

The last time I spoke with Bud, was just prior to the Salt Lake City reunion. I asked him if he was going to be able to attend the reunion. Mr. Biddle reluctantly said he would not be able to attend because of his wife's poor health and had to stay and take care of her. I was so impressed with his selfless service to others. When we visited him he told me he had worked for the VA as his career. I believe this is how this man lived his life. Serving others. I will, and know each of us will truly miss him.

May God bless his family.

Lory Curtis, son of **Bud Curtis**, HQ, 1st Bn



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517th Auxiliary

Dear Bob,

I just sent you the long squib on Amendment No. 2 that was written several months ago. It is the same thing sent you by snail mail a week or so ago. For some reason I was able to copy and paste it in a message to you, something I have not been able to accomplish before. This will avoid the necessity of your scanning it. Although somewhat behind the times, it should be in Mail Call and printed in the Thunderbolt so it can be voted on at the next reunion business meeting. Clair's committee should have it and Mail Call should do that.

Highest regards,

Howard Hensleigh

Dear Merle and Claire,

I am sending this to Mail Call but am making clear that any definitive action will occur only by your action and action of the entire committee.

First let me go back into recent history and lay out what we had in mind during my term as president leading up to the Savannah reunion.

The chief objective of the Association has always been and will always be to perpetuate the memory of the 517 PRCT and its troopers living and dead who made history in liberating Europe from Nazi occupation. Others have been bringing together our troopers, their friends and relatives at reunions, the circulation of the Thunderbolt and more recently Mail Call and the website.

At Savannah we did two things. We adopted bylaw amendments that provided for the Auxiliary, the groundswell for which had been growing for several years, Helen Beddow and I also set aside a specific time and place for our foreign friends to make presentations and interact with those attending the reunion, many of whom had visited our foreign visitors and our battle fields in S. France and Belgium. After watching the results for several years, I am well satisfied that both accomplished much in perpetuating the memory of the 517th and enriching the enjoyment of our reunions in the States and Europe. Last summer's visits to S. France and Belgium stand out as examples of how we and our foreign friends will keep alive our memory with reenactments of our battles and evidences here and there that for many years in the future will remind tourists of the 517th's part in WWII.

We have realized that there would come a time when there would be too few 517th troopers to continue a thriving organization. Merle is to be congratulated in reaching the conclusion that planning for that time must start now if we are to succeed with an orderly passing of the baton at the next reunion to those who have the energy and desire to carry on.

My recommendation is that we amend our bylaws and bring Auxiliary members (relatives of the troopers) into full membership in the Association and merge all Association and Auxiliary members and activities. By having them separate for a few years we have had the opportunity to see if the Auxiliary would thrive; it has.



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Having them separate has given us some advantage with the Commonwealth of MA, in which we are incorporated, and the IRS. In my view the advantages, if any, we give up will be outweighed by those of merging the memberships. This would allow troopers and Auxiliary members to be elected in one meeting with one slate of candidates. If you adopt the amendments at first part of the business meeting of the next reunion, you can merge right there and carry on as one unified organization. We should also be aware of the provisions of Articles XI and XII which allow Board and Membership actions without a meeting. I inserted these articles in the bylaws to make sure we could do things when it was difficult or impossible to hold meetings.

All the work for these changes, as Merle points out, should precede the reunion and be published in the Thunderbolt as required by the bylaws.

My airborne best,

Howard E. Hensleigh

Here is the Amendment I suggest:

AMENDMENT NO. 2

TO THE BYLAWS OF THE 517TH PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM ASSOCIATION, INC.

The bylaws of the 517th Parachute Combat Team Association, Inc. are hereby amended by deleting ARTICLE II, entitled "MEMBERSHIP" and substituting the following:

ARTICLE II MEMBERSHIP

Section 1 MEMBERSHIP. There shall be two classes of membership: Active and Honorary Members.

Section 2. ACTIVE MEMBERS. Active membership is limited to those men who served honorably with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team ("the Combat Team") and their wives, widows, descendants, brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews. Subject to the foregoing and except as otherwise limited by the Articles of Organization or Bylaws of the Association, the Active members shall have such additional rights, including (without limitation) the right to make, amend and repeal the Bylaws and to authorize an amendment or restatement of the Articles of Organization and to authorize consolidation or merger as is conferred upon Voting Members by statute.

Section 3. HONORARY MEMBERS. Honorary membership: The President, with the approval of the Board of Directors, may appoint as Honorary Members individuals who have contributed outstanding service to the Association.

Section 4. No member of the Association shall be liable for any debts or obligations of the Association nor shall they be liable for any assessment therefor. However, Members at any National Reunion, or any special meeting called for the purpose, may fix reasonable annual dues to become effective after not less than ninety (90) days notice to all Members of such action.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

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
- 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

Reunions - Save the Dates!

[Florida Mini-Reunion](#)
January 15-17, 2011
[Register now!](#)

Annual 517th Reunion (Probably the Last)
July 13-18, 2011, Atlanta, GA
with visits to
Camp Toccoa and Fort Benning



See: [1943 Christmas Greetings](#)