



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

**MailCall No. 2041**

**March 6, 2011**

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

Website

[www.517prct.org](http://www.517prct.org)

Mail Call

[MailCall@517prct.org](mailto:MailCall@517prct.org)

Mail Call Archives

[www.517prct.org/archives](http://www.517prct.org/archives)

Roster

[www.517prct.org/roster.pdf](http://www.517prct.org/roster.pdf)

### *Rupert the Dummy Paratrooper*

*From MailCall #2040: Can you explain what this WWII photo is about? -- BB*

Answer: More info on this photo at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfOQuEO9gQg>

There is also an exhibit at Fort Benning with "Oscar the Dummy". There were notes that said Oscar participated in the invasion of Southern France. Can anyone confirm this?



Bob - I'm thinking the answer to the quiz you posed at the end of Mail Call # 2040 is "What are 'para-dummies'?" I'm not sure that was their correct name, but they were typically 18 inches tall and were dropped at/around the same time as paratroopers were. Their purpose was to confuse the enemy and make them think the invading force was actually larger than was really the case.

mark Landreth

Bob this is in regards to the mini paratroopers dropped over Normandy prior to the D-Day Invasion of 1944.

The link below will take you to a short history of US Army Airborne identification bracelets, dog tags and last some dummy miniature paratroopers used in Normandy D Day pre-invasion drop affectionately called Rupert. Also shown is the mini used in the Hollywood movie "The Longest Day". Rupert.. really?

"NEPHEW OF A BUZZARD"

<http://tinyurl.com/48xrgxt>



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### MailCall News

First of all, Bob, thank you for your continuing efforts on Mail Call ... what a treasure it is.

I am working through my congresswoman here in Tenn. to obtain a Bronze Star for my Dad, who was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. I recall an earlier Mail Call from your father – I think – that mentioned that all 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion soldiers were due the Bronze medal for their efforts in the Soy-Hotton engagement. At the time I emailed him back about what I should do to obtain that medal for my deceased father, Gerald M. Nelson PFC, who was wounded on Dec. 23 in that battle. He replied that I just need to go through my Representative in Congress. I got sidetracked and didn't follow up immediately but now I am –and her office has sent me the paperwork to fill out and are asking for any correspondence that might help when they send on to the National Personnel Records Center. Do you have any such available i.e. a document, email, etc. that would be useful ... i.e. something from the Army, etc. that officially announced the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion soldiers were awarded the Bronze ?? is it on the Battling Buzzards website ??? I knew the 1<sup>st</sup> had earned the a Presidential Unit Citation (the verbiage below was copied from the Buzzards website) but I really do recall that the Army had decided to award all solders in the 1<sup>st</sup> .... the Bronze medal . Any help would be greatly appreciated. Cotton Nelson

PS a photo of my father and 2 group photos of the first battalion are on the Buzzards photo page

1/517 PIR [Distinguished Unit Citation](#) [Executive Order No. 9396](#)  
streamer embroidered SOYHOTTEN, BELGIUM

T. Cotton Nelson  
Manager, Public Relations  
National Cotton Council of America  
7193 Goodlett Farms Parkway  
Cordova, TN 38088-2995  
901.274.9030  
[cnelson@cotton.org](mailto:cnelson@cotton.org)

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Cotton,

I'll give you what little info that I know about getting overdue medals. I will post you question on the next MailCall and I bet that someone else will have suggestions.

I'm not sure about whether everyone in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion is due a bronze medal by default. It sure makes sense, but I don't know. However, my understanding is that is that any soldier who was on the front lines of WWII is now eligible for a Bronze Star. And being with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and certainly earning a Purple Heart should be enough proof of that.

When Ben went to get his medals, he went right to our senior senator at the time, Ted Kennedy's office. The response from the senator's office was quick and effective, including a personal awarding of all the medals that Ben never got. (He was wounded and spent 6 months in a hospital



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in England, so he didn't get any medals at the end of the war.) In addition to the Bronze Star and Combat Infantryman's medal, he got the European Campaign medal, the WWII Victory medal, his Purple Heart, his marksman medals (2), and a couple of others. I don't know what he needed for records, other than his discharge papers.

I hope this helps.

Bob Barrett

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Bob:

Prior Mail Calls have carried the message that donations, dues, etc. should be sent to Leo Dean. This should be discontinued and future Mail Calls should indicate Dues, Donations, etc. should be sent to:

Brenda Verbeck Mortensen  
13046 Race Track Road #220  
Tampa, FL 33626

Merle W. Mc Morrow

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Guestbook Entry:

Submitted by	Comments:
Name: <b>William Lee</b> From: Dalton, MA E-mail: <a href="mailto:willee686@gmail.com">willee686@gmail.com</a>	My uncle was Pvt. Lloyd Johansen, 2nd Bat., Co. F, 517th PIR. He was KIA on Jan. 26, 1945 in St. Vith. I have a couple of photos of him and some buddies I would like to submit to this organization. Also, if anyone in this group remembers him or has any information on him in the form of stories or photos, I would appreciate you contacting me.
	Added: March 3, 2011

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Dear sirs,

Attached please find a photo of my uncle, **Lloyd R. Johansen, 2nd Bn, F Co.**, 517th PIR and one of his paratrooper friends whom I can't identify. Lloyd is the shorter man on the left in the photo. I suspect it was taken stateside before they deployed overseas but that's only a guess. Perhaps someone in your organization can identify the other trooper in the photo and maybe even where it was taken.

Lloyd was KIA on Jan. 26th, 1945 in St. Vith according to a telegram I have that was sent from my grandfather to my mother notifying her of his death, and from various written accounts and



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reports of the Battle of the Bulge available on the internet.



I have been able to piece together a fairly good idea of the troop movements, actions, and areas his company was involved in leading up to the time of his death but it would be nice to have more details and it would be even better to find there was still someone around from the 517th who served with him or remembered him, or if he was mentioned in one of their "stories". But I doubt if that's very likely this many years after the war.

Too bad the internet in its present form wasn't around 30 or 40 years ago when many of the heroes of the 517th were still with us and the likelihood of finding someone who knew him was much higher. It would have been great to correspond with them.

I remember seeing another photo of Lloyd and 3 other men amongst the ton of old letters and stuff I inherited from my mother after she passed away in 1999. They were in combat gear standing on a ridge somewhere in Italy or Southern France and they are all heavily bearded in the photo, so my guess is that it was taken sometime during or soon after they were on combat expedition. I will rummage around and see if I can locate it. If

so, I will scan it and send it.

My mother's youngest sister is still alive and I believe she may have more photos, documents or other mementos from Lloyd that he sent her from Europe or else that she inherited from my grandfather or one of the other brothers and sisters when they passed away. I will attempt to contact her and find out what she has and forward them if I can.

You have a great web site and I'm gratified to find that someone is keeping alive the memories and the deeds of these great men of the 517th who fought so hard and suffered so much to save the world from evil. They are deserving of much more honor and praise than we are capable of heaping upon them. Indeed, they are the "Greatest Generation".

Sincerely yours,

William A. Lee  
Dalton, MA



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Dear sirs,

Attached is a copy of the telegraph sent to my mother from my grandfather (Vigo Johansen) notifying her of the death of my uncle, **Pvt. Lloyd R. Johansen**, 2nd Bn, Co. F., 517th PIR. When I reflected upon how many telegrams just like this went out to families and friends during the war, and the broken hearts and countless tears that were shed for our fallen heroes, I thought perhaps it might lend a stark yet fitting and poignant addition to your website. I submit it to you respectfully and in hopes it won't tarnish or detract from any memories of your members or offend anyone.

Sincerely yours,

William Lee  
Dalton, MA

<b>CLASS OF SERVICE</b> This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.	<b>WESTERN UNION</b> A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT	1201	<b>SYMBOLS</b> DL = Day Letter NL = Night Letter LC = Deferred Cable NLT = Cable Night Letter Ship Radiogram
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The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

7A723 6=YAKIMA WASH 13 442P  
MRS W A LEE=  
1945 FEB 13 PM 6 07  
LLOYD KILLED JAN 26TH IN BELGIUM:  
=VIGO<sub>g</sub>  
26.1  
14  
sfo

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

This old sniper still has the eye for it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQRpAxGVg4M>

Jerry Wofford



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To Whom it May Concern,

I am seeking information about my grandfather, **Isaac "Ike" Darrel Shaver**, who served in the 517th, **HQ Company 2nd Battalion**. We've been able to track down a few pictures from your website (which was a wonderful surprise) but I was hoping to be able to acquire any information that you may provide. I know that the chance is remote, but still I must try. I believe he was good friends with Harvey W. Van Geem (sp?) if that helps. My family has a copy of "Paratroopers' Odyssey," and "Battling Buzzards," and we are also in the process of buying every other book we can get our hands on in order to find out more about the movements of his company and who his friends were.

I'm sad to say that my beloved grandfather is no longer with us; he was killed in a car accident with his wife (and high school sweetheart - we still have all the letters he wrote her during the war) in 1996. Over the next few weeks, my family and I will put together some information and possibly some pictures for you, so that you can update your site with his information.

Thank you for your help, and thank you for putting this website together. It truly is a treasure.

--

Claire Shaver Day

See photo at: [http://www.517prct.org/photos/crater\\_rome.htm](http://www.517prct.org/photos/crater_rome.htm)

### *The 517<sup>th</sup> Auxiliary and Future Reunions*

Hello all -

We brainstormed during fall and December of last year, and then I attended the Kissimmee reunion. The feeling at Kissimmee was - to summarize - that the organization should continue to exist but there was an acknowledgment that the responsibilities and duties should probably pass to the Auxiliary. Dissolution does not ever seem to be anyone's first choice.

You have all indicated that the Association should move forward - in some format - and not dissolve. I concur.

Has everyone reviewed Howard's proposed amendment to the by-laws, which would provide for this? It is conveniently in this Mail Call, forwarded here. It is also, for notice purposes to the Association membership, in the Thunderbolt currently at the printer.

The work of the 517 is not yet concluded, I feel. Please review the proposed amendment and advise whether you concur with submitting it to the membership for approval and adoption.

Thank you all -

**Claire**

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

Dear Chairman Claire and committee members,

In answer to a mail call message imploring continuance of the 517th activities, I responded in a mail call that Bob will probably have in this weekend's version. It is a how to do it at Atlanta. You may consider this as you head to the reunion.

Looking forward to the Thunderbolt, HH

[Howard Hensleigh]

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### Note to **Richard H. Wheeler:**

When thinning Association membership raised the question of how do we operate in the future, the president formed a committee and I drafted an amendment to the bylaws that will (when passed) merge the memberships of Auxiliary and Association. Right now, to be a member of the Association, you must have been a member of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. As a member of the 460th, you fall in that category. Your wife, cousins, nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts and descendants are eligible for the Auxiliary. If the amendment is passed at the reunion in Atlanta, all of you will be Association members--allowed to attend business meetings, vote, hold office etc.

Here is my conception of how it should work at Atlanta: After your luncheon you should assemble in one body for the business meeting; the first item on the agenda should be a vote on the membership consolidation amendment. After it is read, explained and discussed, a voice vote should be taken if it appears that there is no or little opposition. When passed, the memberships will be merged and all will be Association members. There will no longer be a separate Auxiliary. Then you can go ahead with election of officers, determine where the next reunion will be, if there is to be one, and take up any other item on the agenda, with all in the room entitled to vote. You will end up with one set of officers, one treasurer and treasury and all activities merged.

It will be necessary to publish the Amendment in the next Thunderbolt. It has already been published in MailCall a month or so ago.

If there are questions or discussion, please send a message to Bob and we will try to get everything ready for Atlanta.

All the way,

**Howard Hensleigh**



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Bob:

It is encouraging to see such interest in continuing future reunions as that expressed by Richard Wheeler in MailCall #2040. His interest and enthusiasm is exactly what is needed to insure that the 517th Association will continue to function as a viable organization well into the future.

Richard's name should be on a listing as a possible candidate who will provide a host city and chair one of the future reunions.

**Merle**

### *Name That Trooper*

The year was 1943 and our mystery trooper for this edition was a fun loving lad from the state of Texas. He was admittedly a natural born "hell raiser" and lived up to the title most of the time. At the age of 19 he was expelled as a student from Texas A&M University for disciplinary reasons. As the war had been ramping up for many months now he had little choice but to consider what military branch of service he would choose as his new draft status would surely place him at the top of the induction list. He knew that he had a great dislike for the Germans after finding out from his dad who worked at the Houston ship channel port for Phillips Petroleum Company, that all too often British tankers that would leave the Phillips Petroleum dock loaded with oil bound for England were routinely torpedoed by German submarines as they entered the Gulf Of Mexico. So he decided to join the paratroopers for the excitement as well as the jump pay and he knew he would most likely spend his war time in the European Campaign fighting the Germans.

He reported to Camp Toccoa in March of 1943 and was promptly assigned to the 1st Battalion of the newly formed 517th PRCT. He soon found that he was not the only "hell raiser" in the 517th. So he fit right in with the crowd at Camp Toccoa. He gained rank easily and before long found himself sailing along with the rest of the 517th on board the troop ship SS Santa Rosa steaming for some unknown port in Italy. They experienced their first taste of real combat and "saw the elephant" for the first time in Italy. It wasn't until then that he realized that those people on the other side were trying to kill him, imagine that. He proved to be a natural leader in combat. While in the area of Nice along the Riviera, the nearby town of Sospel was being held under siege. During this time the 517th was fed a steady diet of death and destruction with no let up. Extended combat had the effect of hardening the men's hearts as it concerned living and killing. It seemed that their very souls were becoming calloused to the carnage on both sides.

One account written in the Gerald Astor book "Battling Buzzards", gave an account of a battle near Sospel between A Company and a German patrol that had inadvertently wandered too close. After a tremendous battle the guys from A Company gained the upper hand and eventually killed all Germans in the patrol that did not escape. After the battle A company was stuck in a holding pattern for several days and the stench of rotting corpses of the deceased Germans was becoming more than they could bear. The guys were ordered to dig an artillery shell hole a little deeper to form a burial pit so that the German dead could be buried. This was done and after the last shovel of dirt was thrown on the mass grave, someone suggested that a few words should be spoken in behalf of the ill-fated soldiers. Everyone removed their helmets and lowered their heads. Even Colonel





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Graves had resorted to dark humor during the harshness of the extended combat period. His words were, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. If the mortars don't get you, then the M-1's must". At this the troopers all put their helmets back on and crawled back to their dugouts. That is the way it was, life was losing its preciousness amidst the chaos of war.

During this time of siege as they surrounded Sospel, the 517th was becoming depleted personnel wise, especially in officer's ranks due to officers becoming casualties during the many fierce exchanges with the enemy. To help fill the void in officer grade men, our mystery trooper who was an enlisted man was given a battlefield commission and promoted to 2nd Lieutenant.

One of the major problems facing the 517th was the constant mining of the perimeter around Sospel by Germans with mines and booby traps. The 596th Engineers anti ordnance team would routinely go into a mined area and clear all explosives and then place white tape in that area to signify that the area had been cleared for troop movement. Unbeknownst to 517th intelligence personnel, was the fact that in the darkness of night, German demolitions teams would invade the unmanned part of the perimeter that had been cleared with white tape and then place new mines in that area. The result was deadly for the 517th. The dilemma was that the 517th had no idea how the enemy was able to penetrate the perimeter and get past guards to do their dirty work. After being an officer for about a week our new mystery '2nd Louie' and his men were given the task of setting out to find out where the Germans were coming through our lines and to put a stop to it.

Our mystery trooper did reconnaissance of the problem area until a secret trail leading from below the hill was found. He began making plans for an ambush in the area of this trail, and appointed two rifle squads to assist him while they hid in wait on each side of the trail in hopes of catching the enemy in a cross fire situation. After two days of lying in wait for the ambush, they finally heard rustling sounds coming up from the trail. Contact was made with the lead enemy patrol as they entered the area and his cross fire plan was working nicely as they were placing effective fire on approaching enemy troops. The lieutenant and his corporal, Van Regenmorten, were standing within two feet of each other when suddenly a deafening explosion rocked the whole hillside and hurled both men through the air. The two men lying on the ground after the dust settled looked like dirty, bloody, tattered ragdolls. Both men began to stir and tried to assess their wounds. The corporal's right leg had been blown away in the explosion and he was bleeding badly, while our lieutenant had a badly mangled left leg and was unable to stand. His left leg below the knee looked like ribbons of torn flesh with shards of bone protruding. He was hit with shrapnel in the other leg and body as well. He was bleeding profusely. His leg was so badly shattered that trying to walk using his rifle as a crutch was just too painful. Part of the mangled leg would drag the ground with every step. It was at this point that he made the decision to take his knife and remove what was left of the shattered left leg below the knee. Believe it or not the lieutenant was able to cut off that part of the leg. Not a very sterile environment for such a delicate surgery. Both of the troopers were in great pain and were both losing a great deal of blood.

The lieutenant decided that it was useless for the pair to try to get away and ordered the two rifle patrols to retreat as they were taking fire from down the hill. It had started to snow and drizzle rain by then so the men covered the two wounded men with a large piece of tin roofing that was blown off a nearby building during the barrage. Luckily both he and the corporal were wearing scarves made of old parachute material which were then fashioned into tourniquets to help slow the blood flow. They had no medic on this patrol and no morphine for pain so the two of them had to tough it out as they waited for the Germans to find them. Amazingly the Germans did not make it to the top



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of the hill as they had also called for a retreat. The two troopers laid there as the snow and light drizzle continued to fall on them. The lieutenant described how the warm blood was melting the snow as it slowly began to flow down the slope.

Later in the day a 517th rescue team found the pair and administered first aid. They brought a medic, two stretchers and finally morphine for their pain. Although they were in shock thank God they were still alive. Our lieutenant would not allow them take him away until Corporal Van Regenmorten was evacuated.

To call these guys heroes would be putting it mildly but this is the raw truth and their ordeal was likely understated by them because that is the way these guys were. According to his account of the story our lieutenant said he never saw corporal Regenmorten again after that. The lieutenant was taken on a stretcher out of the area and later was strapped to the hood of a jeep for transport to a battalion medical clearing station where the leg was given what was termed a "guillotine amputation" by battalion surgeons. After being stabilized, the lieutenant was in and out of several hospitals in Europe and was finally shipped stateside aboard the SS Santa Rosa, the same ship that had brought them to Italy at the beginning of this saga. In the states he was fitted with a prosthetic leg during his stay at the Army hospital. Finally in November 1946 a full two years after the explosion that maimed him, he was discharged from the Army.

It was this kind of devotion to the welfare of each other that was common among men whose lives depended on each other to have their backs during countless days of combat. The fact that our lieutenant would not allow corpsmen to take him from the battlefield until after the corporal who had been in his charge was removed, is a beautiful sentiment and says a lot about how these men felt toward each other.

Do you think you know the name of our mystery lieutenant??? The answer to this quiz will be in the next edition of 517th Mail Call.

'Nephew Of A Buzzard'



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

*Palm Springs – April 2011*

## 517<sup>th</sup> PRCT West Coast Party 2011



Ready for some fun in Palm Springs? Here we go again! Always a good time when we are together!

**April 11-** Official Registration  
Hospitality Suite open 10 am-10pm

**April 12-** Bar-b-que Buffet for troopers and families. Hawaiian attire.

**April 13-** Social Day

**April 14-** Mens business meeting 1000-1130  
Canyon Country Club 7 pm-1000 pm Farewell Banquet, dinner and dancing

**April 15-** Checkout, travel home safely.

Rooms 84.00 + 15.5 % tax  
1800 East Palm Canyon Drive  
Make reservations by calling Holiday Inn  
1 800 315 2621

**Be sure to mention 517<sup>th</sup> PCT**

Registration is 70.00 per person, includes bar-b-que, and farewell banquet.

Mail registration checks to:

Karen Wallace  
66295 Hwy 20  
Bend, OR 97701  
541 318 5919

Email [karenwsky@gmail.com](mailto:karenwsky@gmail.com)

Name of

Guests \_\_\_\_\_

**Please circle the extra activities you would be interested in attending if available**

- Elks Club for dinner and karaoke
  - Indian Casino for lunch
    - Follies
- Ride on the Palm Springs Tram to 8516 ft above the city



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## 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:

Brenda Verbeck Mortensen  
13046 Race Track Road #220  
Tampa, FL 33626

### Annual 517th Reunion (Probably the Last)

July 13-18, 2011, Atlanta, GA

with visits to

Camp Toccoa and Fort Benning



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM