



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



MailCall No. 2057

June 26, 2011

*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 (from 2008) www.517prct.org/roster.pdf

Atlanta Reunion

(Probably the Last) Annual 517th Reunion

July 13-18, 2011

Atlanta, GA with visits to Camp Toccoa and Fort Benning

[Program](#)

[Registration Form](#)

[Hotel Info](#)

Bob, I didn't see a link for reunion registration in MailCall. Armed Forces Reunion has informed me that people can no longer register online. For those who have not registered yet they will have to do it by mail. **I would encourage everyone who is wanting to attend the reunion to get their registration in now. See you in Atlanta.**

I just received this information about registration for the reunion from Armed Forces Reunion. **"Yes, they can mail their forms in with a check or they can fax w/ the credit card info to 757-627-3807."**

I checked AFR registration roster, and best I can determine is we have 137 people who have signed up for our reunion online. Last week was the last time they could do that by email. Now registration has to be done by fax or U.S. Mail. I have 104 people who have signed up to ride the bus to Fort Benning, and 116 to Camp Toccoa. There are only 27 517th PRCT vets who have signed up via email.

Lory Curtis, reunion chairman



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Bob,

Please let everyone know that as of today, June 20, 2011, there are only 23 more days left until our final reunion. I hope we have a great turnout for this one last Hurrah for these wonderful men of the 517th PRCT who sacrificed all for every one of us. Hope to see you in Atlanta, June 14-18, 2011.

Lory Curtis, reunion chairman

Mail Call News

Hi, are you still the webmaster for the 517th's page? I am trying to find email or other contact info for Tom Reber about the 1943 Fort Benning parachute training booklet he posted. do you have any contact info for him?

All best, Tanya

Tanya Lee Stone

www.tanyastone.com;

Sibert Medal Winner: Almost Astronauts

Golden Kite Award Winner: The Good, the Bad, and the Barbie

Hello again,

Thank you for putting Tom Reber in touch with me. I am also trying to contact Frank Ramos for the same reason. He and I were in touch several months back and I have a voice mail message from him, but I can no longer find his phone number. It is in reference to this page:

http://www.517prct.org/documents/1943_paratrooper_training_fort_benning/ft_benning.htm

All best, Tanya

Tanya Lee Stone



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Dear friends,

Here is a picture of the last Memorial Day celebration in Draguignan American cemetery. We will organise a ceremony also on the 16th of August.

For the 14th to 17th of August celebration of Southern France Airborne Operation, Veterans, friends and family planning to come are welcome to contact us as soon as possible to book accomodation hotels and welcome as the best as we could ..

email Address : anvil-dragon@hotmail.com

Kind regards to you all,

J. Mickael & Eric,

"15 aout 1944" Airborne Museum Association

letter Box : BP :79

83490 Le MUY France





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In Memorium – Richard H. Wheeler

Bob
Hello, Bob -

**Richard H. Wheeler 517th PRCT
460th Prcht FA Bn, Bty B Sect. 1**

Richard died Fri., 17June2011, Age 87
Asthma/COPD/Cardiac

Katherine Kramer



Bob,
Katherine Wheeler emailed me to let me know her husband Richard Wheeler, 460th Field Artillery, 517th PRCT passed away. It had been my pleasure to know Katherine and Richard at the many National Reunions they attended. In fact they drove all the way from Ohio to Salt Lake City for our reunion in 2009. Richard always attended our banquets dressed in the traditional WWII paratrooper jump uniform. He always looked dashing, good looking and ready for another combat jump. To Katherine and all of Richard's family, the Curtis family sends their deepest sympathies and condolences at the loss of this great man. It was my honor and privilege to know him.

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

517th Guestbook

Bob,
New 517th Guestbook Entry: See the [Guestbook](#)

Submitted by	Comments:
Name: Mariann Meehan Kmetz From: Palmerton, Pa E-mail: mkmetz@ptd.net	I am seeking any information about my dad. William T Meehan. 517th parachute combat team company 3 RD BN.
	Added: June 24, 2011



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Bob Hope Visits Camp Toccoa - 1943

Bob,

I just received this about Bob Hope entertaining the troops throughout the years. During the Viet Nam war I arrived in country the first week of January 1973. Bob Hope had been to our base just before Christmas. The stage where he performed was still setup. All the guys showed me their pictures of his show. I missed seeing him by only a few days. In later years I remember my Dad saying he and the men of the 517th got to see Bob Hope at Camp Toccoa, GA, in 1943. I attached a few pages from my Dad's book. See what I wrote about Bob Hope's visit to Camp Toccoa.

Enjoy the Bob Hope video!

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

Bud wrote his Dad on May 8, 1943 about Bob Hope coming to visit the camp and what a great show he put on. Bud and other soldiers probably never knew why Bob Hope came to entertain them. In the book *Paratrooper Odyssey*, the question was answered and recorded this way: "The Regimental S-2 Captain Albin Dearing was a sophisticated and cosmopolitan man with literary and theatrical connections. On learning one day that the well-known comedian Bob Hope was scheduled for an appearance in Atlanta, Dearing asked Colonel Walsh for permission to try to get him to make a side trip to Camp Toccoa. To the great surprise of everyone except Dearing, Hope agreed, and a few days later a C47 carrying him and his troupe put down after dark at a tiny nearby airstrip. Bob Hope was a quick study. His success is based in large part upon his ability to adapt to the idiosyncrasies of any particular audience. Enroute to the camp Colonel Walsh gave him a quick rundown on paratroopers and parachute training.

The entire regiment was assembled in the Post theatre. After being introduced with a not very original pun ("... I now present our last Hope. ...") Mr. Hope delighted his audience by pretending to struggle through an exaggerated pushup. The performance was brilliant. The troopers felt that if a celebrity like Bob Hope could take time to visit tiny Camp Toccoa, perhaps their efforts were being appreciated. In his own way Bob Hope contributed greatly to the war effort."



The First Edition of the Thunderbolt, Camp Toccoa, Georgia, August 1943, Volume 1, Number 1 had reporters writing about Bob Hope's visit to the camp.

"Bob Hope Livens Routine Grind With Hot Performance" Colonna, Langford, Romano, Vague Help Keep Rookies Rolling In The Aisles"

"The rookie left his barracks and marched down to the theatre. This night was to be his. Something different was coming into his sheltered Paratrooper's life. Why? Bob Hope was coming tonight. The Rookie would get his mind off the obstacle course. That run up Mt. Currahee could be forgotten—at least until tomorrow. What if his rifle wasn't clean. The sarge wouldn't see it—he was at the show.



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Bob Hope reads inscription on leather cigarette case given him by Colonel Walsh as S/Sgt Oliver looks on



Lt Schmitz leads Songs then... ..



So what happens? He walks into the theatre and after nearly an hour's wait during which Lt Schmitz led the boys in a little song fest, the one and only Bob Hope walks out on the stage. They are going to put the new roof on the movie house any day now, but that is not the important thing. Do you know what that Hope did the very first thing? That's right—he got down and did push-ups. Of course his nice plaid coat got a little dusty and he collapsed after the fourth one, but that's not the point. The memories of the day's work were brought back to mind.

However, it is doubtful that anyone thought of anything but the fugitive from a tooth paste ad for the next hour and a half as he gave the boys all he and his cast had for the rest of the evening.

Besides Hope there was Frances Langford who probably would have drawn the boys out without the rest of the cast. Tony Romano slipped in some soothing guitar music to counter Miss Langford's swiny tunes.

Vera Vague Steals Show

Then came the fun. First there was Vera Vague. Her slanderous cracks about herself seemed very strange to the boys who were seeing her in person for the first time. She is far from the Brenda and Cobina type that she makes herself out on the radio.

Then came the pay off. The rookies of the Second World War were taken back to the Spanish American fracas as a pair of handle bars crossed the stage under the nose of one Jerry Colona. Those men whose sides were still intact went the limit with their laughs as he sang in his own inimitable way, bellowing out the first eight or ten words in one big yell then settling down to real nonsense.

It was a contented crowd of soldiers—that is, paratroopers—who filed back to their bunks. Yes, they rose at 5:45, but it didn't matter that they were up til 12 the night before.

After the show, Hope was made honorary member of the officer's mess and presented with a leather cigarette case."



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Hoyt Kelley's WWII Journal

Hoyt Kelley, HQ Co, 1st Battalion, send in an amazing journal of his WWII memories. Here are a few short excerpts:



Camp Toccoa was a basic training camp. The training was rough and it seemed the purpose was to get rid of anyone who could not make it. We were a combat outfit. We were informed that there would be no applications accepted for O.C.S. (Officers Candidate School), as we were to go overseas as a fighting unit. We ran for six miles every morning starting at six, and had the usual training of marching and gunnery range in addition to specialized training for jumping out of planes. They had mock up towers to jump from, and we had to practice jumping from heights of 12 feet, landing and rolling. Much of the paratroop training was still in the experimental stage. I believe four other parachute regiments trained before us and probably five after.

We were the first regiment to jump with the Army helmets which weighed six pounds. Previous jumpers had used the air corps crash helmets. They had also used folding stock carbines, and we jumped with the M1 Garand Rifle. The first regiments were taught to jump with their feet apart so the shock would go equally to their hips, we were taught to jump with our feet together, because of the high number of fractures they had. The average man in our outfit was six foot tall and weighed 160 pounds. I don't think any one of them varied beyond two inches or ten pounds from that average. We were, I believe, because of this the finest marching group that the army had. Of course one of the things we liked was our ten inch jump boots with our pants tucked in, and we wore the soft army hat, cocked to one side. We despised, and I do to this day the army hat with a brim. It was usually worn by the M.P.'s. It was never popular for us to wear medals and decorations, like the Marines did.

Toward the end of our basic training they selected about a dozen of us for Military Intelligence Training. I remember Captain Mitchell, who was an English Captain who had been brought over to teach our Military Intelligence School. He was really a nut, but smart. One day while we were taking a break he wired our seats up with blasting caps and pull wires. Of course, when we came back in, the whole room exploded, putting three of our fellows in the hospital with numerous holes in their legs. I fortunately escaped, but the Captain, fortunately, did not escape a reprimand by the commanding officer.

There was no time for games, entertainment or anything else, we were dead tired. After a few weeks and dependent on our good behavior we were granted passes to go into town. Toccoa had a USO Club, but was a small town with little else to offer. Cornelia was also small but we got to know people there, and my friend and I had girl friends who were from the Garrison family there. There were four Garrison girls, no boys. Frank Garrison had a large peach orchard property. I think he had about 40 trainloads of peaches going out each year, so was one of the more wealthy families there. Mrs. Garrison taught at the Piedmont College and was a friend of the famous Soong sisters (one of which was Madam Chiang Kai Chek.). We went there for dinner and one week went up to Talulua Lake camping. They were wonderful people to me.



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They were devout Methodists, and didn't believe in dancing. They had about 15 white families and about the same number of Negroes who lived on their land in homes provided for them. They were paid about \$14.50 a month (white) and \$9.50 (black) but they had their homes and gardens and Mr. Garrison always got billed by the doctors for their doctor bills and medicine etc.

Without any notice we received orders to get on trucks that would transport us to Newport News, Virginia for transport over-seas. We had much of our training, hacking our way through growth with machetes, and most of us thought that we would be going to the Pacific, but that was not to be the case. The Newport News Camp was a holding place until ships arrived for transport, and we stayed there about two weeks. During this time a Negro barracks was burned, and our outfit was blamed for it, so the camp commander would not grant any paratroopers passes off the base. As a result of this one night we decided to go into Norfolk on our own without passes. We went out through the back of the camp, climbed the fence and hitch hiked our way into Norfolk. We were walking down the street, when one of the officers from our company came along and told us to join him at a party they were having. We just arrived at the party when the M.P.'s raided the party and we were all thrown in the brig by the M.P's. The head M.P. had just become a Captain that day and he was extremely obnoxious to us, as he hated paratroopers as trouble makers. Someone set one of the toilets on fire and that created some problems and they brought in extra guards. There were several sailors there who were queers, as we called them then. I had never seen one before, and they were all made up with lipstick etc. The captain came to the window and told us that our outfit was sailing overseas that night and that we would all be court marshaled for desertion. I had a few words with him, and told him I knew he was lying, that has always been a bad habit of mine, and he signaled me out for special treatment. Soon trucks arrived to take us back to camp. They loaded us up, about 25 in all, half officers, half enlisted men, in one truck and followed it with the other truck which had a machine mounted on it and a spot light shining on us through out the trip. When they got us back to camp they tried to find Colonel Boyle to court marshal us before the camp commander could, because you can only be court marshaled once for an offense. They found Colonel Boyle, who had just got back from town himself, very drunk, and put him in a cold shower to sober him up. He staggered out wet and dripping to where we were all lined up and said "break them, and take away their jump pay". While this was a relief, I should mention that the only people you break are non-commissioned officers. So the officers and the privates lost their jump pay like the rest of us, but we Non-Com's also lost our Sergeant's pay as well.

The next day we loaded on the ship for overseas. The Sergeant Major of the outfit said that the camp commander had gone to the Pentagon to override Colonel Boyle's courtmarshal, and served Colonel Boyle papers as we were getting on the ship, which he claimed to have accidentally dropped in the water off the gang plank. This may or may not be true, as things that seemed so were seldom true in the army.

I do not know where civilians go during a war but they do disappear, and we used any homes we found for shelter, although much of the fighting in this area was in the tops of the mountains where there were not houses. Our command post was kind of a half way house, on the crest of the hill, where the road dropped down into Sospel. It was a stone house, with a large fireplace, and the only house within several miles. We lived in slit trenches or fox holes for weeks and months. They filled full of water when it rained, sometimes you were buried when a shell hit close. The fox holes were small round holes, enlarged underground to give you enough room to curl up and sleep. When a foxhole was not available, I remember sleeping at night with a tree in my middle so I wouldn't roll down the hill asleep. When we could get back to the command house, we could get a cup of coffee as they kept a big iron kettle boiling in the fireplace all the time and occasionally threw in a few handfuls of coffee and a bucket of



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water. I remember one night sleeping on the cobblestone floor, and I think of it as being one of the greatest night's sleeps I ever had -- to be on a floor that was flat and to have the protection of a house over and around me. It is amazing how wonderful simple comforts can be when you don't have them. I never drank coffee or wine before I went to Europe. But with the quality of the water, you would not have survived dysentery long without boiling water or having wine to drink.

After several days, the Germans were forced out of the town and our troops returned. The First Battalion, of which I was the Staff Sergeant, was given a command to rescue a platoon of the armored division surrounded by the Germans in a town called Hotton. An American Infantry Division, (I think the 79th) fresh from the states had tried to get them out but had been annihilated in the attempt. We had to take a circuitous route in order to have cover from the forest. By the route we took, I would guess it was about eight miles. Before we got to the town of Hotton, the trapped Infantry Division opened fire on us. We contacted them by radio, but they were too frightened to believe that we were actually Americans and kept firing. They didn't know the code of the day, which all men on the line had to know. Colonel Boyle got on the phone and using some choice cuss words from his early life in New York, informed them that if they fired one more shot we were equipped to wipe them out. They seemed to understand good American cussing and let us come in. When we reached the infantry division, we found only one officer, a very young Captain, probably in his early twenties in charge. He informed us that all the other officers were back in the town, as he was the only one who had gone with the troops. They had tried to cross an open field about a mile square in size, and the Germans let them get all the way into the field and then mowed them down with machine guns as well as on tanks. The field held some 200 to 300 dead Americans. They died in close formation as if they were on their way to a picnic. We couldn't believe the lack of training that could lead to such a massacre, or the officers sitting back in the city who should have been with the men if not leading the green soldiers who never made it through their first day of combat.

It was on the last day of battle Dave Hines was killed. Dave was a Sergeant in D Company in charge of operations for his company. After being mortally wounded by a piece of shrapnel in the chest, he waved his men back to take cover and died. I was called out that night to identify the dead. They had all come in on trucks loaded with corpses intertwined with American and German bodies. They laid them out in a tent, and I identified Dave Hines and another man from my squad. The man from my squad had worn an extra dog tag, from one of our fellows previously killed, because he said if he were killed he wanted his mother to think he was missing in action, as he worried about her heart condition.³ I left the tags on him in accordance with his wishes and I presume his mother died thinking her son was missing in action. I do not wish to moralize on the advisability this action or my almost killing Lieutenant Allingham -- those were different times.

I never got used to death. I did get hardened to it so that seeing dead soldiers didn't bother me. However, I never got used to seeing young women or children dead. I remember near Stavelot a soldier picking up what he thought was a doll by the leg (you know, the kind they have in the old country that are realistic dolls with long legs and arms) and it was really a dead girl of about three. The soldier was a replacement from the States and got very sick.

For Hoyt's complete WWII journal, see:

http://517prct.org/bios/hoyt_kelley/hoyt_kelley_journal.pdf



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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
- 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:

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

