



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2060

July 17th, 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

(Possibly Not) The Last Annual Reunion of the 517th PRCT - Atlanta



Mel Dahlberg, a World War II paratrooper with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, far right, chats with graduates of the Basic Airborne Course at Fort Benning Friday morning during a graduation ceremony.



Ray Hess of Bethlehem, PA., a World War II paratrooper with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, talks with an active duty soldier at the graduation ceremony Friday morning.

Friday, Jul. 15, 2011

A graduation ceremony for the Basic Airborne Course at Fort Benning brought back powerful memories for some members of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team early Friday. – [From the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer]

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Sixty-eight years ago, Seitz was a young commander when he selected 300 men to become combat paratroopers known as the "Battling Buzzards."

In what may be their last reunion, members of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team were recognized at the same field where soldiers trained to earn their jump wings more than six decades ago.

Shortly after completing training at Fort Benning and Camp Toccoa in North Georgia, the combat paratroopers saw heavy action during World War in Italy, southern France and the Battle of the Bulge.

After the ceremony, the soldiers went on a tour of the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center.

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Marvin Moles, left, with the help of his daughter, Diane Lynch, pins Airborne wings on a graduate of the Basic Airborne Course at Fort Benning Friday morning during a graduation ceremony. Moles, a paratrooper with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team in World War II, was among the group of former paratroopers visiting Fort Benning Friday morning as part of a reunion.



Retired Lt. Gen. Richard Seitz, who as a young commander selected 300 men to form the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, known as the "Battling Buzzards," acknowledges the applause of those gathered on Fort Benning's Eubanks Field at a graduation ceremony for the Basic Airborne Course.



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From the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer:



News - Fort Benning
Saturday, Jul. 16, 2011

After 68 years, ‘Battling Buzzards’ reunite for last time at Fort Benning

By BEN WRIGHT

Members of a World War II combat unit known as the “Battling Buzzards” returned to Fort Benning’s Eubanks Field for the last time Friday during a reunion at the jump school.

“This is the end of the line,” Marvin Moles said as 435 Airborne graduates were presented jump wings during a 9 a.m. ceremony. “We are back where we started in 1943.”

Moles of Dublin, Va., was one of 30 members of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team who came to Fort Benning to watch an Airborne graduation ceremony similar to the one that turned them into elite paratroopers 68 years ago. It was the last reunion for the soldiers, many in their late 80s and early 90s. The soldiers saw heavy action in Italy, southern France and the Battle of the Bulge during World War II but couldn’t have been successful on the battlefield without training at Fort Benning and at Camp Toccoa in north Georgia.

Moles recalled how soldiers were ordered to run 1,500 yards to determine the best soldiers to fight. At Fort Benning, Moles said none of the soldiers in training failed to get through jump school.

“That’s a pretty good record,” he said.

After jump school and another six months of advance training, Moles fought two battles in Italy before his unit jumped into the dark during the invasion of southern France on Aug. 15, 1944. Landing some 35 to 40 miles off their course, Moles said he watched one of his fellow soldiers drop through a tiled roof.

“You just went out the plane,” he said. “My plane was slow and my chute was open when I hit the ground. I was relieved to get on ground.”

And so was Joe Calder of Raleigh, N.C. For Calder, the invasion of France brought back memories of jump training at Fort Benning.

Calder, 89, said he could have been lost if he had parachuted into one of the large wells in France.

“In France, they had great big wells,” he said using his hands to describe the opening. “If I had been about a foot farther that way, I would have went down that damn well.”

The 517th were scattered and that forced some of the combat team to join lost British paratroopers.

“It was a band of about 100 of us,” Calder said.



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Calder said he never forgot about a black truck driver who wanted to fight with a combat unit. He left his 2-ton truck and joined the 517th, even though blacks weren't allowed in combat units at the time.

"He left his truck and came with us as a rifleman," Calder said. "He stayed with us three months or so. When he went back to his truck, the commander had to write a letter and explain he was with the 517th on the front line."

Ray Hess, 86, of Bethlehem, Pa., said it's a wonderful feeling to return to where it all started.

"We were the first to jump with helmets," he said.

The visit to Fort Benning was eye opening for many of family members who came to experience what their fathers had only told stories about.

Donna Shelton of St. Louis and her sister, Diane Lynch of Dublin, Va., came with their father, Marvin Moles.

"This is extremely special for everyone," Lynch said. "He has told us many stories. He has painted a story with words."

Shelton said all the grandchildren love to hear Moles tell stories about the "Battling Buzzards." When Moles saw the "Band of Brothers," an 11-hour World War II television miniseries, he said it was close to his experiences in war. "He said he smelled the smoke, smelled the burning flesh," Shelton said. "He said it came right back to him. It was all right there. He said that was real."

Carole Calder, daughter of Joe Calder, said the reunion was really a proud day.

"It makes me understand what he went through with this group," she said.

After the ceremony, the soldiers and relatives went on a tour of the National Infantry Museum & Soldier Center.

The graduation ceremony also showed the spirit of the Airborne soldier.

"It's exhilarating to see the spirit," said Lt. Gen. Richard Seitz, a young commander of the combat team in 1943. "That's one thing that hasn't changed. The spirit is still great, the enthusiasm."

Seitz, 93, of Junction City, Kan., said soldiers still walk the same as they did 68 years ago.

"They strut just like they used to," he said. "They have respect like they used to. They have that look in their eyes and the training is so good."



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Lud Gibbons of Laguna Woods, CA was among the World War II paratroopers with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team visiting Fort Benning Friday morning.

Text and Photos from Columbus Ledger-Enquirer:

<http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/2011/07/15/1658602/world-war-ii-paratroopers-with.html>



Mel Dahlberg was among the World War II paratroopers with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team visiting Fort Benning Friday morning.



Joseph Calder of Raleigh, NC, was among the World War II paratroopers with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team visiting Fort Benning Friday morning.

Sample comments posted on the Ledger-Enquirer web site:

I wish I had known about this earlier. I would have loved to thank these guys personally.
WANKER

Thank God for this generation of soldiers. I am always amazed at how these men were ready and went forward with their mission. God Bless.

fred43

We are thankful for these Brave Warriors, part of "The Greatest Generation" that stepped up to the plate during our country's darkest hours.

WolfMan

these are the true American Heroes; young men who gave it all for something they believed in - for the better of mankind, not just America.

Too bad the end of an era has come, and this team will not get together again. Thank God we have many young men and women who have picked the charge and are going forward with it. These are the Heroes of today, as a nation, we need to continue supporting them and their families - those who are fighting America's war.

Godspeed "Battling Buzzards"



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mfmariani

You've got that right! The word hero is bandied around left, right, and center these days, but these guys are the definition of the word. My fellow Brits and myself will always be aware of the debt of gratitude that we owe these brave men. I take my hat off to the Battling Buzzards!

WANKER

These are the guys who should be teaching portions of history instead of the bozos they have doing it from K-12 level.

ColumbusIsInbred

Welcome "home" to all of our heroes, especially the men of the 517th. If you see these gentlemen, please salute them even if you have never been in the military yourself. They along with millions that came before us literally saved our lives. Think about it my friends.

Spanky

Welcome back to Ft. Benning. Thank you for your service to our great country.

God Speed...

hokiedad

Read more: <http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/2011/07/16/1657873/wwii-veterans-return-to-post.html>

More pictures from Atlanta, Fort Benning and Toccoa, GA:



Mel Dahlberg inspecting the Troops at Fort Benning



Lory Curtis (blue shirt) at the Benning Airborne class graduation ceremony.



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Melvin Biddle's (B Company) picture in the Fort Benning "Hall of Heroes", honoring all the Army Infantry Medal of Honor recipients



517th Troopers at the Fort Benning reception



Nolan Powell and son at the Toccoa Memorial



Gene Frice marching at the Toccoa memorial



This photo was at the Toccoa museum.

I wish I got a better picture of this. (Someone please send me a better photo). – Bob B.

Back row, second from the left, with mustache, is Col. "Wild Bill" Boyle.



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Mail Call News

Just wanted to show off my new vanity plates. Pretty spiffy!

John Coffee
WW2 Airborne Historical Company



Gents,

Thanks so much for all your help, but I received another email from Lt. Irwin's Grandson and it's a different man. Apparently, his Grandmother found a copy of his separation papers and he was with 3rd Bn., 188th GIR, 11th Abn Div. from May '45 to Aug. '46. So, not a 517er at all. Thanks again. Looking forward to the next time we might meet.

John Coffee

Morris,

I am sorry this has taken so long for me to get you this it has been a little hectic. Have fun at the reunion and we will be thinking about all of you.

Here is Dad's new information

William Herbert Ford

Northeast Atlanta Rehabilitation Center

1500 South Johnson Ferry Rd.

Room 212B

Atlanta, Georgia 30319

The phone number is 404-252-2002 then ask for Room 212B Ford

Take care and hope to see you soon.

Best,

Kyle Ford

404-433-4578

kfsrep1@yahoo.com



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A great message on America by Gen Ritchie

[Brig. Gen. Steve Ritchie and the Rescue of Roger Locher in North Vietnam](#)

- also check out the associated video's ([The 10 best "low flyby's"](#)) Wow!!!! with sound.
-

Gene Frice

In Memorium – Fran Barrett



Mary Fran Barrett (at 90 years old) on a "Snow Day"

To the Barrett family

My condolence and prayers go out to all of you with the loss of Fran. I am so happy her interment will be next to Ben. Having attended Ben's funeral that is such a peaceful and beautiful location.

Fran was a wonderful person. I first met her in Sparks, NV 20 years ago and at various 517 Reunions since. Probably my fondness memories of her were in her later years. I will always remember her sitting in her Wheel chair with her little white dog in her lap.

A special thanks to Joanne Barrett for being the very best care giver I have ever met. In Fran's later years you never saw her without Joanne by her side.

Rest in peace Fran,

Darrell Egner

So sorry to hear of Fran's death. She was a special person and will continue to be missed. She was a special friend.
Sorry Bob and family.

Babbie

Trivia Question -- Generals of the 517th

Can you name all the soldiers who were promoted to the rank of General?

1. **Lieutenant General Richard J. Sietz** (Major at Camp Toccoa, 1st Battalion)
2. **Major General Sydney Michael Marks** (Platoon Leader C Company, 1st Battalion)
3. **Major General John Henry Neiler** (Platoon Leader, Company Executive Officer, and Battle and Regimental S2 with the 517)
4. **Brigadier General David E. Grange Jr.** (Infantry)
5. **Brigadier General Richard J. Eaton** (Corporal A Company, 1st Battalion)
6. Luis Walsh (Colonel, Commanding Officer at Camp Toccoa)
7. **Melvin Zais** (?rd Battalion Major at Camp Toccoa)
8. **????**



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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