



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2098

March 17, 2012

*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

A Reconciliation from Germany

In the past mail call, there was a brief exchange of emails between **Howard Hensleigh**, and a person named **Georg Rieck** from Germany. I don't think you or anybody else grasped the actual significance and meaning of this exchange, and Mr Hensleigh has asked me to write a brief explanatory report. Indeed, the story is quite incredible, unique and tragic. – **Jean-Loup Gassend**

It all started near Peira Cava, southern France, in 1944. A patrol of the 517th ran into an ambush set by German troops on a mountain path; and forced the paratroopers to retreat with some casualties. A few hours later, a group of I Company men accompanied by Lt Howard Hensleigh returned to the site of the ambush from the rear, hoping to be able to surprise the Germans. Lt Hensleigh described the action in the following manner:



The wedding photo

“I told **Fuller** we should cross over the ridge until we were past the ambush, then hit them from their rear. We did that and designated a sharp shooting sergeant to fire the first shot. When I was sure we had gone far enough, we re-crossed the ridge, put the platoon ‘as skirmishers’ and started to close in. The Germans were all facing the other way eating lunch out of sardine cans and so forth. We got within fifty to a hundred yards from them before the sergeant took his first shot. When the fire came from many angles, all the Germans but one realized the gig was up. We could hear people groaning and one thing and other, and we had no casualties at all, so I yelled: “Handen hoch” and all but one came up with their hands up. But then there was a German non-com in a bush that had a machine gun, and he would start firing at us



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and the other Germans would hit the dirt. This happened two or three times. I told **Woodhull**: “Woody, somebody’s got to knock that guy off”, and so he and I crawled forward to get the die-hard. When the German non-com would be shooting his machine gun, I could see the leaves of the bush vibrating, so I knew pretty much right where he was. But they had smokeless ammunition, which we didn’t, so I knew I had to get the guy with one clip of ammunition because there wouldn’t be a second chance. I put a whole M-1 clip into the bush and I did kill him. Then I yelled: “Handen hoch” and “Kamerad” and all these Germans got up and we took them prisoner. I searched the non-com and found pictures in his back pack, including the guy’s wedding picture. It is a shame we couldn’t have met in different circumstances. He was a brave guy. We might have been friends.”

Howard Hensleigh carefully preserved the wedding pictures that he had found on the German soldier and later glued them into his album of wartime souvenirs. Some people would think keeping such a memento is particularly morbid, but many soldiers preserved photos or ID papers of enemies they had killed in combat, as if a sort of link had been created between them. I was fortunate enough to visit Mr. Hensleigh in Menlo Park in 2008 and was able to scan the wedding photos of the killed German soldier. I sent the pictures to the website and they can be seen here:

http://www.517prct.org/photos/howard_hensleigh/hensleigh.htm

I am particularly fond of researching such wartime souvenirs, and made no exception in this case. I decided to try to find out who the German soldier in the photo was. This seemed like a difficult endeavour as the only evidence was the stamp on the photos indicating that they had been printed at the “Zirlik studio”, in Ellwangen an der Jagst, Germany... and of course the knowledge that they showed a German soldier killed in southern France sometime in late 1944.

In 2008 I found in the German telephone book that the Zirlik studio still exists, so sent them a letter with copies of the photos, asking if they knew who the soldier in the picture was. They unfortunately replied that their basement had been flooded after the war and their archives thus destroyed. After this I forgot about this research project until recently, thinking that the case could never be solved.

However, the German War Graves Commission website has recently set up a new research tool with which one can research killed soldiers according to their location of birth. When I noticed this, I typed in ‘Ellwangen’ as a town of birth. A large number of results came up, and I checked all those for men who had died in late 1944. After a few checks, I was stunned to find that a Feldwebel Georg Rieck, born in Ellwangen, had been killed in 1944 ‘near Breil sur Roya’. Breil sur Roya in one of the towns in the vicinity of Peira Cava, and Feldwebel is a rank corresponding to that of the soldier in the wedding photo. The chances were very high that this Georg Rieck was the man I was looking for.

I immediately printed new copies of the wedding photos, and sent them to Ellwangen, explaining the





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tragic story behind the pictures and saying that they apparently represented Georg Rieck. I asked if he had any family members still alive today, or if there was any way of verifying that it was indeed him the photos. After my letter arrived in the town hall in Ellwangen, it was quickly verified that these were Georg Rieck's wedding photos, and that Georg Rieck had a surviving son and grandson. Georg Rieck had gotten married in 1944, and when he was killed his wife was about five months pregnant, giving birth to her son Achim in January 1945. My letter and the pictures were passed onto the son and grandson (whose name is also Georg Rieck).

Nearly 70 years after the war, a German man was therefore receiving a letter containing his father's wedding pictures, and finding out that the man who had shot his father in 1944 was still alive and well, and that he could get in touch with him. How would he react to this information? Without fully realizing it, I had created a situation that was very awkward and that had the potential of becoming very unpleasant, depending on how the family reacted.

On his own accord, Georg Rieck, the grandson, searched up Mr Hensleigh on google, and thanks to all the contributions Mr Hensleigh has made to this website, he was easily able to find his email address. Below are some extracts of the email exchange that the young German had with the old American soldier who had defeated his grandfather in combat so long ago:

Sent: Mar 7, 2012 5:16 AM

Subject: Thank you from Germany

Dear Mr. Hensleigh,

thank you so much for the photographs of my Grandfather you gave to **Jean-Loup Gassend**. Today they where sent to me from the Citybureau of Ellwangen, where my Grandfather lived.

Last Year i found and visited his Grave in France. He is reburied on an Soldier-Graveyard near Dagneux, a little Village near Lyon.

I've also been in the mountains near Peira Cava, was searching for the Place he died. But i'm not sure if i found it.

My name is also Georg Rieck, I'm 38 Years old and i work as a Paramedic in Wuerzburg/Bavaria.

Again, thank you so much, Mr. Hensleigh

God bless you and your Family

Yours sincerely

Georg Rieck



I am sorry for my bad English

I will try to send two photos in a seperate email.



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2012/3/7

Dear Georg:

I am happy that what Jean-Loup and I did resulted in finding a grandson. I have a good recollection of the territory around Pierra Cava and may be able to assist you in finding the location you are looking for when I have more information about the pictures.

We appreciate what you and your countrymen have done after the war to make Europe a safer and more united continent. From 1958 to 1960 I was the Legal Advisor of the US Mission to NATO and appreciated the support your country representatives gave us on our European production weapons projects.

Your English is fine, much better than my German.

Highest regards and God bless you and your family,

Howard Hensleigh

Sent: Mar 7, 2012 12:17 PM

Dear Mr Hensleigh,

here are the photos i told about. when we where on the mountain above peira cave, we thought that this could be the possible place. maybe i am able to take a screenshot from google maps and mark the place there. i would like to return there again.

there are not many things left from my grandfather. some more pictures, some letters from the wehrmacht and some storys in my mind, grandma told me about. she died in 2004. After the war she married again and had a daughter, my aunt. Her name is Heidi Johnson and she lives in Spencer Oklahoma. My father doesent talk much about his Dad. He was born in January 22th 1945. He travelled one time to his Fathers grave, then never. I want to tell you something more about Georg Rieck.

He was born 18.November 1916 in Ellwangen. He workes in his Fathers Shop as a Basket-Maker. He had 4 Brothers and two Sisters. One of his Brothers suicided after got woundet in the war. The other one was named Kurt and he was a Stukka Pilot. I don` t know much about the other two. It seems that Georg and Kurt had a strong competition in the family, especially during the war. That might explain why he went to France althoug his wife was pregnant and he got woundet 12 times during war. His desicion to fight on was voluntary.

His was in the 7th Company, Infanterie-Regiment 107 and fought in 1940 in Luxemburg, Aisne/Loire, Belgium, then 1941 in Minsk, Smolensk and Gomel. In 1942 he was near Juchnov and 1943 in Poltawa and Tscherkassy. In March and April 1944 he was in Uman and finally from July 1944 in Genua. The last Entries in the Protocol is August 1944 Nizza and September/Octorber 1944 Ligurien. I also have a



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letter from the medic, that took his body down to Breil sur Roye and buried him there. That was two weeks after his death.

There are so many questions left, especially-why didn't he stay at home with his wife. He must have known that the war was lost. Why didn't he give up. Nobody will answer that at last. In the letters that i have are Named other soldiers also. Even at the soldiers graveyard in Dagneux are gravestones with their names around grandfathers grave. If you think that is important to somebody else, i can give you that names and send pictures from the graves. maybe there is somebody who is interested in that.

So i close for today and would be very happy, it we could stay in contact. Maybe i can contact Mr.Gassend and meet him someday.

With best regards,
Georg Rieck

Dear Georg, I could not bring your photos up on my computer, but Jean-Loup says the paths around Pierra Cava are old and still there. He may be able to get maps and together we may be able to find the approximate location you are interested in. You are to be commended for your interest in your grandfather who never saw his son and for carrying his name into the 21st Century.

My highest regards, Howard Hensleigh

Sent: Mar 10, 2012 5:56 PM

Dear Mr Hensleigh,

It is a very important need to me that you know this. nobody of my family, especially my father Achim and i, have any bad or angry thoughts and feelings towards you. i think in a war is no time for discussions, if or not. decisions are made under pressure, who pulls the trigger first, you or me.i can comprehend that.

That war that Germany startet was wrong. What you und your comrades risked to free Europe is invaluable. the losses from fathers, sons and friends were painfull and sad, no matter on which site. the fact, that my father (and his generation) could grow up in peace as a free man and even my generation is owed to you and all americans and allied who brought down the nazi-regime.

Today every Child at school learns the German History well. In a few years i will tell my son Julian (he`s 6 of age) about his Grandgrandfather.

I hope i found the words i searched for. it is all how it should be.

with greatest respect and in friendship

Georg



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Sent: Mar 11, 2012 11:40 AM

Dear Georg,

It is difficult to find the words to express my gratitude for your message. I was concerned at first and lost some sleep over the possible attitude of you and your family about my responsibility for your grandfather's death. I can understand why you might feel resentment. But, that was a long time ago and your grandfather and I were both doing what our governments expected of us. I do not think he had a choice of being where he was or being at home with his pregnant wife no matter how many times he had been previously wounded. I don't think the German army gave him that choice.

That our governments have been seeking the same objectives for many years has contributed to a different and better world in which we can take an honest view of the past and discover the details that many wartime families must live without. To know the facts eliminates the agonizing mystery.

Again, my highest regards to you and your family, HH

Dear Mr Hensleigh

It looks like this matter was solved in the best manner possible considering the circumstances. Perhaps this was just one of those things that were meant to be? It seems to have brought, after the initial surprise, some peace of mind to both parties involved, even if it needed almost 70 years to happen.

Best regards

Jean-Loup



Jean-Loup Gassend
and Howard Hensleigh

Menlo Park, CA
2008



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MailCall News

Bob:

I received an obituary for **Steven "Kopie" Kovach (Hq 3rd)** who died on February 27, 2012. He was raised in Woodbridge, NJ but lived in Mcleanville, NC for 11 years prior to his death. He was a Radio Operator in service.

I received the obituary from a 551st trooper (Pat Casanova from South Amboy, NJ) who went into southern France on August 15, 1944. How would you like to be in service with a last name like that?

Merle

Subject: movie interviews in Salt Lake City

Just curious, has the interviews in Salt Lake City already happened? Are they only interested in interviews or memorabilia as well?

Alysa Burkman

We will do the interview of **Hoyt Kelley**, HQ, 1st Bn this coming Wednesday, March 14th. If you have anything you want displayed in memorabilia, or have a trooper who can come for the interviews please let me know right away. You can email me at drlvc@comcast.net. I get that on my phone.

Lory

RE: CAMOUFLAGING BIG GUNS; **517TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT, LOGBIERME (?), BELGIUM, 01/16/1945**

I was a bit surprised – OK, disappointed -- to not hear any feedback from you troopers or friends about the Logbierme video that Mark Landreth found in the National Archives, as reported in MailCall #2095.

- Can anyone figure out the locations of the video?
- Can we verify that it really is the 517th?
- Does it look like the correct uniforms and conditions at that time?

From what I have read, we know that C Company passed through that area around that time.

– **Bob Barrett**

click here to see the video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXJRf1czxs>

Note that you have to skip ahead to minute 6:30 to see the 517th.





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I also did a Google search for photos of Logbierme, and ran across this. -- BB



Corporal Tony D'addio of Battery D, 460th Field Artillery Battalion, 106th ID labors to sight in a 75mm pack howitzer outside the Belgian town Logbierme

From <http://www.americainwwii.com/galleries/2009/icy-battle-of-the-bulge.html>

*Back in MailCalls 2069 through 2075, several people talked about **Danny Fisher** who was killed after being ordered to climb an electric pole and take out the power with a pick-axe on August 15, 1944.*

I just ran across his picture. How sad that this young man was needlessly killed. I will put this on the web site soon. – BB

Cpl. Daniel A. Fisher

HQ Company 1st Bn.

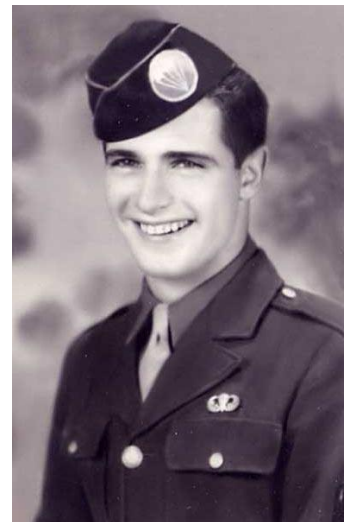
from Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin

SN: 36810354

KIA: 15th August 1944, Southern France

Gravesite:

Rhone American Cemetery, Draguignan, France Plot D Row 6 Grave 20



Found at: <http://www.specialforcesroh.com/browse.php?mode=viewroll&sort=a&catid=68&page=14>



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On the same tribute site ([Special Forces Roll of Honor](#)), I also found info on **Alec Le Vernoy**. It says that he was a "liaison officer" to the 517th, starting January 1945. He wrote an autobiography: "No Drums, No Trumpets":

"From the battlefields of France 1940 where he escaped from a German field hospital to predominantly operating behind enemy lines in Africa, where he was involved in clandestine operations of espionage and sabotage. He was to be WIA (wounded in Action) 4 different times! (Once whilst driving a jeep with the SAS!) To being captured a total of 4 different times (Twice by the Vichy regime) - And on one occasion having been sent to a Concentration camp. All from which he escaped! His lists of decorations are long!"



Can anyone verify his connection with the 517? – BB

Bob, can you post this in the next Mailcall? Glad **Hal Roberts** is doing great in our neck of the woods, and thanks to an unknown samaritan, help recover a priceless treasure for us all...

Scott Ross

The following was reported on MSNBC, from the Seattle area: <http://tinyurl.com/86l6ogy>

WWII vet gets treasured keepsake back

By KING 5 News

GIG HARBOR, Wash. - A World War II vet who lost a precious keepsake has gotten it back.

Harold "Hal" Roberts carried a paratrooper's "jump wings" pin with him everywhere he went for 68 years, until it fell out of his pocket back in January - most likely in the parking lot of the QFC in Gig Harbor.



It was heartbreaking for the 90-year-old vet who credits the pin, and the blessings from a little girl, with saving his life when his jeep hit a landmine.

The pin turned up at a retirement home about two blocks from the QFC where Roberts thought he thought he lost it. He says he checked that retirement home a couple of weeks ago and there was nothing there. But the manager says over the weekend it mysteriously appeared in the lost and found.



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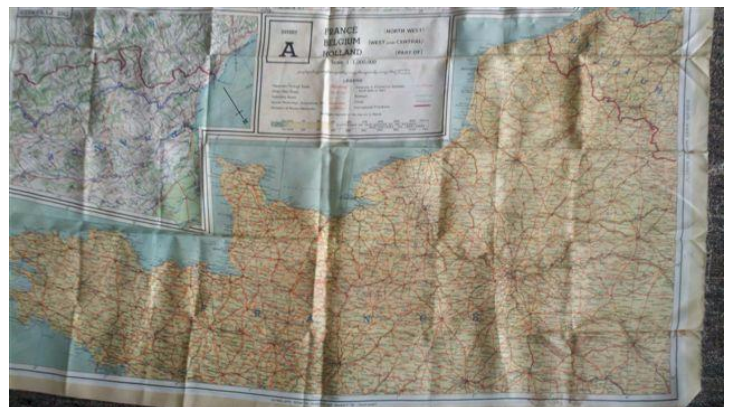
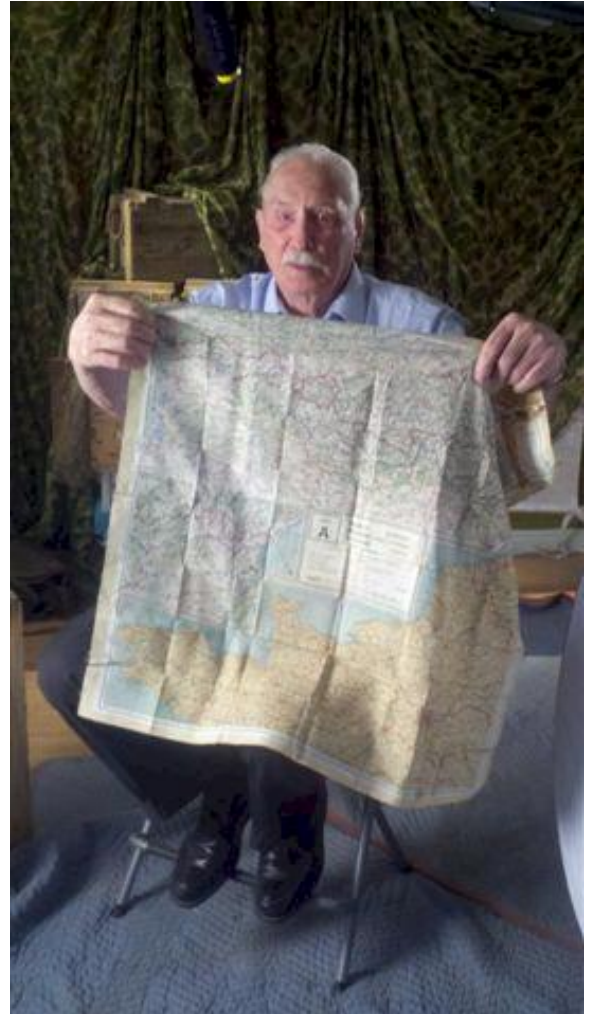
I wanted to report to everyone about the T.V. spot that will air locally here in Salt Lake City, March 31st at 4:30 pm on KSL television. The spot is to promote the movie called Saints and Soldiers Airborne Creed that centers around the 517th and operation Dragoon. Mr. **Bob West**, HQ, 2nd Battalion, of St George, Utah, (5 hours south of Salt Lake City) was unable to be interviewed. But, yesterday, March 13, 2012, **Hoyt Kelley**, former Staff Sergeant with HQ, 1st Battalion came to the studio to be interviewed. Mr. Kelley drove over 100+ miles by himself from Logan Utah to do the interview. I want to let everyone know what a wonderful, thorough interview he gave about the 517th. It will make everyone very proud to be associated with this very esteemed unit. I was so impressed with his memory and knowledge of events that occurred over 69 years ago.

Attached is a picture I took of **Hoyt Kelley** holding a silk map along with other pictures I took of the silk maps. He told me he was given these maps in preparation for the jump into Southern France. I never knew the leaders had these maps. It was so interesting to see them printed on silk. I would sure like to hear more about these maps from other troopers of the 517th.

Mr. Kelley was there just about two hours giving important historical information about the 517th. The producer told Mr. Kelley he would get a copy of the interview to him sometime in April. I am hoping we can post it on mailcall.

I was also told by the producer they would have someone at our National reunion in July. So please make plans now to register and attend our National reunion July 12-16, 2012 in Kansas City. Registration forms are posted here in mailcall.

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



To: Howard Hensleigh

MailCall # 2098

Send news to MailCall@517prct.org

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Subject: **Lt Ridler**

Hello again

I have a question to ask you on a completely different topic. What was the mission of Lt Ridler and his men on the day that he got killed at Col de Braus?

I have read versions giving the impression that Lt Ridler was leading a sort of attack on Col de Braus. However, as far as I understand, there were too few men involved for it to be an attack, and the two enlisted men I talked to who were with him at the time both said that it was a simple patrol that turned bad when they were ambushed.

Do you have any knowledge about this either way?

Jean-Loup

When I first joined G Co. **Art Riddler** was in charge of G Co. as the executive officer while **Capt. Hooper** was on leave. He was an excellent officer and preferred to lead a platoon rather than be number 2 at company level. Although this is described as an attack on Col de Braus, it was an attack on Ridge X which runs to the south. Ridge X as you can see today provided the Germans a formidable defense position. We had been moving the Germans east at a good clip and First Special Service Force occupied Col de Braus and Ridge X when they were relieved and moved south. Unfortunately they just moved out before we relieved them in place and the Germans moved in and occupied both sides of the road running through Col de Braus, including what we called Listner Hill for **Capt. Johnie Listner** whose 2nd Bn. company took it several times and were driven off by fire from the huge French artillery pieces in the forts to the south. This hill or mountain had a number also and was often referred to by that number. This was a costly mistake that took many 517th lives including Art Riddler's. You can call it a patrol or an attack. If a patrol, it was a combat patrol with the objective of occupying Ridge X. I was not involved nor were any of my S-2 men.

Dick Spencer was wounded in the attack, went to a field hospital and while there talked to a reporter about the attack who wrote it up in Yank magazine. The reporter gave S-2 hell for not knowing the Germans were there and putting the platoon at risk. Everyone knew the Germans were on Ridge X in sufficient force to given an attacker a hard time. In a few days G and H Co. made a coordinated attack with 460th and mortar support and took Ridge X. It was a hell of a job with all that support. The reporter came to our area and took many good pictures of the Col de Braus area including the French forts chiseled into the mountains. I have all of the pictures which after giving me hell -- not by name -- he was good enough to send me. **Dick Spencer** wrote a poem not naming Art and ending with, "The gods of war are doubly unkind; The ones they hurts most are the ones left behind." (may not be an exact quote) I think Dick not only had in mind Art's widow and son he had not seen, but many of the rest of us. If there is any valid criticism of Art's attack or combat patrol order, it is expresses in the old army saying, Don't send a platoon to do a job if you have a battalion to do it. This may be more than you bargained for, but it is as I saw it.

Highest regards, HH

see: [Dick Spencer's poem](#)



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RE: Problems printing the reunion forms

Bob, I don't know how you work at your job and still put out a great and informative Mail Call each week.* I retired at age 55 and I still haven't caught up. OK, the older I get the slower I get. In the last Mail Call you mentioned some people were unable to print the forms for the Kansas City Reunion. I was one of them! This prompted me to try again to print the forms. The following worked for me:

I went to the FILE menu and hit print. Nothing happened.
Then I went to the black bar you flash on the bottom of the item and saw the printer symbol.
I hit that and still it didn't print but a menu popped up.
At that point I selected my printer and now I have all the forms printed.

Hopefully this will help others to make it work. When it comes to computers I am not the sharpest kid on the block so maybe you could word the fix so everyone could understand what I am trying to say. Keep up the good work Bob.

Regards,

Darrell Egner

Darrell has figured out a workaround, at least. The problem is apparently that some browsers, including Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE), don't play well with the new version of Adobe reader when displaying pdf files. If you open pdf files (and all recent MailCall's and the reunion attachments are in that format), and then move your mouse pointer near the bottom of the page, you'll see a navigation bar hovering that looks like this:



See the printer icon, second from the left? Try that to print any documents.

There are lots of other postings on the internet about this issue, but the fixes are all complicated, starting with deleting and then reloading Adobe Acrobat.

Darrell asked "I don't know how you work at your job and still put out a great and informative Mail Call each week." The normal procedure, which works best during football season, is that I collect news sent to me during the week, and on Sunday afternoons I turn on the TV, have a coffee (OK, maybe one beer sometimes), and work on the MailCall. In the old days, it took me less than an hour. But when people send in lots of photos and items that belong on the web site – our public historical repository – yes, it can take me a lot longer. Usually I have to resize the photos to fit, and I have to play around with the MailCall format to get it looking OK. The funny part is that the last few months, I am getting more and more submissions sent in – which is great! – so it can take more than a few hours each week. I do try to get a head start during the week, just to catch up a little, and so I don't get too confused about whether I've already included items. I don't always win that battle. – Bob Barrett



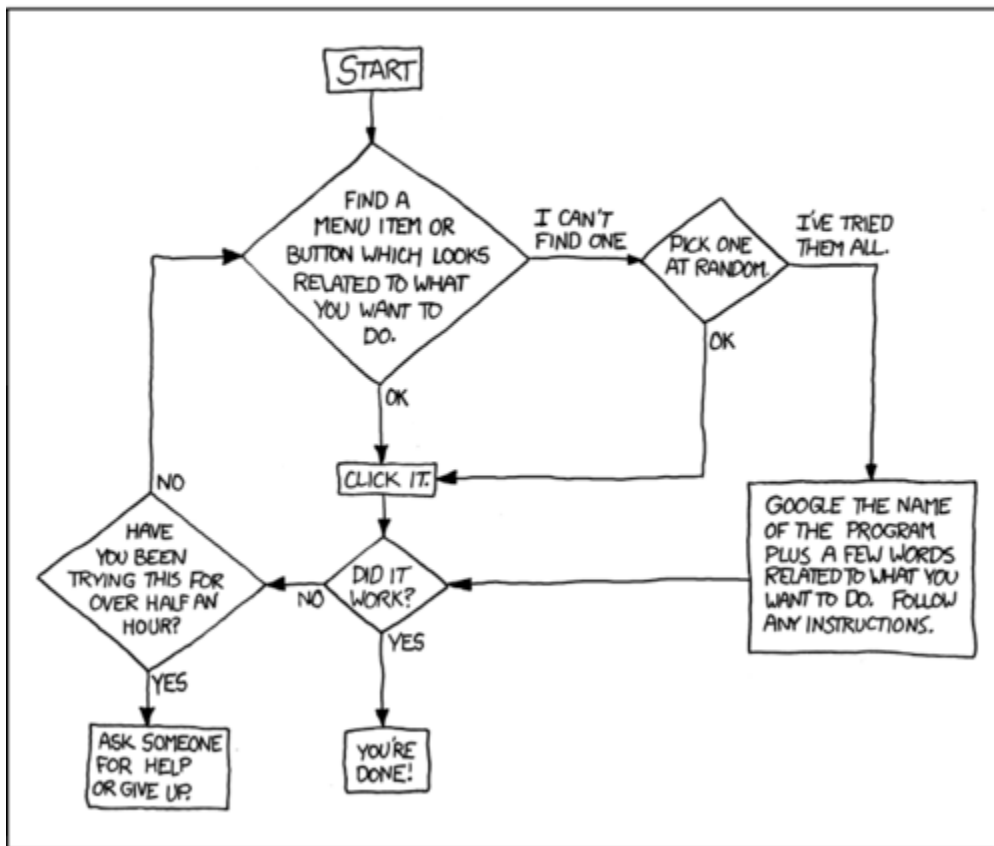
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While we're at it, I know that many of you think that I know a lot about computers. I might, but most of it I learned by having a problem and just looking up how to fix it. In most cases, someone else has had the same problem before. – Bob B.

Here is my cheat sheet:

DEAR VARIOUS PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, CO-WORKERS,
AND OTHER "NOT COMPUTER PEOPLE."

WE DON'T MAGICALLY KNOW HOW TO DO EVERYTHING IN EVERY
PROGRAM. WHEN WE HELP YOU, WE'RE USUALLY JUST DOING THIS:



PLEASE PRINT THIS FLOWCHART OUT AND TAPE IT NEAR YOUR SCREEN.
CONGRATULATIONS; YOU'RE NOW THE LOCAL COMPUTER EXPERT!



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Recent website additions:

[Silk Maps of Europe - 1944](#)

[Tony D'Addio, D Battery, 460th PFAB in Logbierme, Belgium](#)

[Danny Fisher, HQ/1 \(KIA\)](#)

[Papers and souvenirs from Odas Sweet](#)

[Raymond Bunce, F Company bio - enlistment through Italy](#)

[War Correspondent's Notebook: Red Cross Man Makes 8 Jumps With Paratroopers](#)

[242 photos of George A Sullivan and A Company](#)

[Commendation to 1st Battalion from the 3rd Armored Division](#)

Reunion Info

West Coast Mini-Reunion

Palm Springs, CA

May 14-18, 2012

[Information and registration instructions](#)

Annual National Reunion

Kansas City, MO

July 12-16, 2012

[Program](#)

[Registration Form](#)

[Hotel Registration Form](#)

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 new Association Treasurer: Identify the purpose of any donation (Annual Dues, etc.) and make all checks payable to:

517 PRCT Association, Inc.

c/o Joanne Barrett

70 Pleasant Street

Cohasset, MA 02025