



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



MailCall No. 2120

August 25, 2012

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

Website
Mail Call
Mail Call Archives
Roster (from 2008)

www.517prct.org
MailCall@517prct.org
www.517prct.org/archives
www.517prct.org/roster.pdf

MailCall News

Don Edwin Walker

May 21, 1929 - August 5, 2012
Wichita Falls, Texas

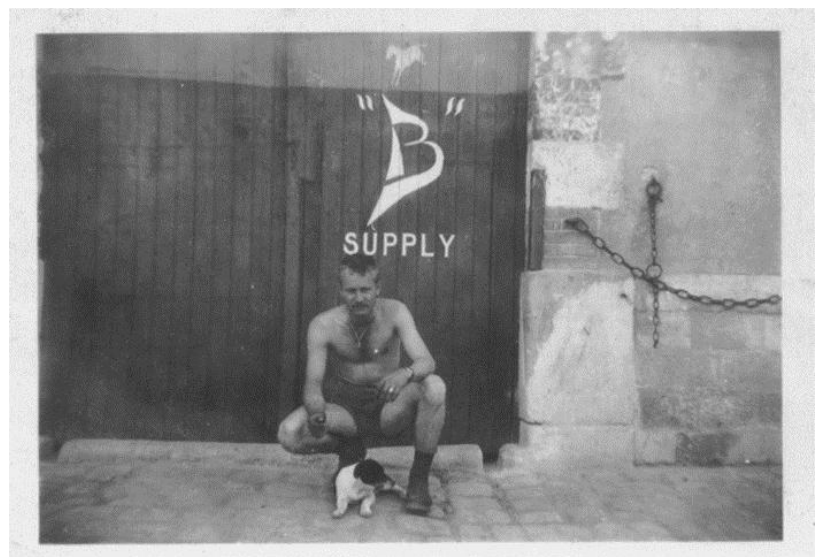
Don was born on May 21, 1929 and passed away on Sunday, August 5, 2012.

Don was a resident of Wichita Falls, Texas at the time of his passing.

He was preceded in death by his wife Jean.

The family will be holding a memorial reception in Don's honor at 3515 Windsor Lane, Friday, August 10, 2012 from 3 to 7 PM.

Picture of **Donald E. Walker**, the dog's name is Cesspool. Don is my wife's uncle by marriage. He is 87 years of age and is living in Wichita Falls Texas – from Jim Williams (Oct. 2009)





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Submitted by

Name: **Jim Williams**
From: Kennesaw, Ga
E-mail: jwilli1@bellsouth.net

Comments:

Pfc Donald E. Walker, Co B 517th passed away early this afternoon, (8-23-12), just about one month short of his 90th birthday. He lived in Wichita Falls, Tx. I feel there has already been a great reunion with lots of his buddies who passed before him.

Added: August 23, 2012

Me again Bob,

I would have mentioned this in my earlier email to you but have tried calling Ponnie back and only get her answering machine. Will try again tonight.

In a recent Mail Call you had a fellow (can't find my notes right now - probably the same place that damn business card is) telling about a WW II thing he and others were doing last weekend in NE Ohio. The first person I thought of was Ponnie because she lives in Cleveland, just down the highway from Conneaut. I called the guy whose name and phone number you had in Mail Call. We had a great conversation as I told him that Ponnie would be an excellent representative of the 517th PRCT if she could get to his event.

I was in Iowa all weekend but when I got back Ponnie had left a phone message about the "wonderful" time she had at said event in Conneaut. Her son drove her there and Ponnie said she was "treated like royalty."

The reason I'm passing this information on to you now is that Ponnie doesn't "do the Internet." I think her experience, representing the 517th, is something of value to include in a future Mail Call. I'd like to visit with her and see if she can get her son or another family member to write down the experiences at Conneaut and transfer that information to Mail Call.

If you already know about this...fine.

Kent

Thanks Bob...

on another matter...**Ponnie Davis** and I visited by phone Tuesday evening. She is still excited about the recent WW II reenactment event in Conneaut, Ohio. She asked me to tell you to hold-up on mentioning anything about her being there until she can write something up for Mail Call. She also has photos she wishes to pass along to you. Again, Ponnie doesn't "do the Internet" so how all of this will get to you is another matter. I'll keep you in-the-know as much as I am informed.

Kent

[OK. I won't say anything. – BB]



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Submitted by

Name: **Mel Trenary**
From: Livingston, tx
E-mail: mctrenary@me.com

Comments:

Here is my email for future reference
Added: August 18, 2012

Yes I would like to get your newsletter I am from the 517 rct I had a beer on the 15 th of aug. to celebrate our jump into s france.

Mel Trenary (A Co.)

Sent from my iPad

Dear Bob and Jean-Loup,

I have a vague recollection of what happened when **Clark Archer** passed on. Clark did not throw many things away and his widow had a disposal problem, but wanted his records to be in the hands of the 517th as I am sure he also desired. It seems to me that someone did pick up his collection, but I made no effort to remember or record the details. Possibly if this gets attention on Mail Call and Thunderbolt someone may respond.

From my own experience, I can understand the frustration of someone trying to trace the reference to statements made in the Odyssey. Unfortunately my contact with the operation was not with Clark, but with **Charles LaChausse** (sp?)(C Company commander and later S-3 of the 1st Bn.) who did quite a bit of the writing and wanted the copyright in his own name--quashed by **Bill Lewis**, who saw to it that Clark got credit as author and that the 517th held the copyright. LaChausse did not use my write ups, but contacted people I named, some of whom had poor memories, and then wrote up his own version of what happened. Since many thought the Odyssey did not give the flavor of the individual soldier's account of the action, there were plans to write as second book with the first-hand accounts. That did not happen but **Tom Cross** was well acquainted with it.

Highest regards,

Howard Hensleigh



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Reports from Southern France

Another photo from Southern France with Allan Johnson and Leo Dean and Adrien Soldi:



France 2012 Quick Report

Greetings -

I have returned from France with Dad (**Allan Johnson, 596**) and **Leo Dean (Reg HQ)**. We also met up with **Ignatious "Joe" Bail**, whom we'd last seen in 2009 as he also received the Legion of Honor. I believe he was with the 460th, which would mean we had the 596, the 460th and the 517 all represented. Joe was there with his entire family including grandchildren. One other US vet, Dick Field of the 551, is also a regular at observances in Provence. Here is a fast summary and a few pics.

We began in Chablis. Dad and the 596 were in Chablis for about a month in spring of 1945, and this is our third visit to try to find where he'd been. We were helped by winery owners, who not only knew the history of the area but also knew of a local mechanic ("garagiste") who had worked on the Jeeps and the GMC trucks when the Americans were there. He still works, but only on the older vehicles, because he's old, he told us.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



On to Geneva, where friend to the 517 **Gilles Guignard** lives. We had a fantastic time in Geneva, seeing all the sights and meeting his family. Gilles, as Mail Call regulars know, is passionate about WWII history, especially in France and especially about the 517. Our route from Geneva to Provence took us down storied National Route 7, which was miles of debris and death in 1944 and 1945. Gilles was able to show us pictures taken of exactly where we were and show us how it looked in the aftermath of battles.

We spent the night in Bollene, near Montelimar, and met local historians and an author there. Willie and Nathalie welcomed us into their home and had produced a dvd of footage both of the area and of the Allied invasion, including that famous clip of our own **Bill Boyle** getting ready to jump.

We arrived to our usual place in Trans-en-Provence (note to 2013 travelers: they are renovating many of the bathrooms from shower over bathtub to a much easier walk-in style, so be sure to ask for *douche italienne* if you have those needs for next year).

This year was the second for events at Le Mittan and La Motte, including a great fete (street party) in La Motte, as well as a fantastic luncheon at Valbourges, where the glider unit landed and also, I think, HQ for the 551st. All of the American vets and their families were also honored to be invited to the annual British welcome luncheon at their hotel, which they describe as a gathering of friends. Les Arcs held a series of commemorations and wreath-layings, followed by a ball; Allan and Leo laid the wreath at the bridge in Les Arcs (Gilles tells me **Bill Boyle** had been right at Les Arcs with **Howard Hensleigh**). We attended a first-ever static line jump in Le Muy at sunset - beautiful, with a total of 21 jumpers. Finally, Salernes has been hosting impressive celebrations for the past few years, including a parade into town from their encampment, reenactment of the arrival of the Allies and the first meeting with local resistance, followed by a series of commemorations, dinner and a fete in town, all organized by Salernes' own **Bertrand Prud'hon**.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



Friends to the 517 and co-founders of the now-closed Musee de la Liberation, (but searching for a new home since the devastating floods of 2010) Eric **Renoux** and **Jean Michel Soldi** are constantly building new connections and working with local organizations to achieve the goal of meaningful and personal commemorations. They are committed to the history of the August 15 Allied invasion, and they have been solid friends to the 517 since before they opened the museum in 1994. They are instrumental to the new La Motte and Le Mittan observances, and the huge luncheon at Valbourges are all their "babies," and they've also been supportive of other events in Les Arcs, Trans and Salernes - and others, I am sure.

Each year, the most meaningful commemoration is the "unofficial" event at the Rhone Cemetery, and this year was no exception. Organized by Jean Mi and Eric, there were probably 200 reenactors, and our British friends always attend. The Rhone, always beautiful, has been invigorated by its new superintendent Bruce Malone and associate Alison Libersa, whom we'd met last year. Alison has worked to increase attendance at the Rhone, reaching out to schools and conducting tours. Bruce, as well, knows and cherishes the stories of those buried there.

If you have a friend or family member buried at the Rhone and would like his story shared, send a photo along with your story or remembrances to Alison at libersaa@abmc.gov

We concluded our trip with good friends to the 517, **Patricia ("Patou") and Roland Orenge** in Sospel. Many of you remember Patou and Roland from the Savannah reunion in 2005, a trip they cherish. Patou and Roland have worked to preserve the memory of the 517's sacrifices in and around Sospel, the last French town liberated in late October, 1944 - more than four months after June 6. They have built a memorial of the items found there on their property, reminding all that the war was literally in their backyard. We had a short service there, remembering not only the losses of 1944-45 but also the fact that **Don Fraser's** ashes were scattered here, as well as that incredible year of 2009, when they





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

had an unbelievable seven veterans there in Sospel.

[Bob - that video of this year's short service was on Patou's facebook page].

Each trip reminds us that the 517 PRCT has many good friends in Europe, that your sacrifice is still - decades later - appreciated and revered. I must have heard people say it to Leo and Allan 10 times, "Thank you. It is because of you that I speak French." They re humbled to represent the good men of the 517, the 460 and the 596.

It is unbelievable to be in France during this time in August. August 15 in the states is rarely recognized; in Provence, it was the beginning of the end of years of hell and occupation.

All the best to my favorite veterans - with thanks -

Claire Johnson Giblin

PS:

I was taking this gentleman's picture in Les Arcs because he was so dignified and majestic. I mean, look at him. We were at the monument for the mayor who was killed in July of 1944.

In thanking him for my photos, I explained that I was here with my father and his friend - both veterans - and I thanked him.

He became very emotional, explaining that he'd been 12 in 1944, and he was so angry, and wanted to help his country so much. He was happy to meet Leo and Allan; Gilles helped with translation.



Yes, that is a Sherman tank. Scared the heck out of me.

These were all taken in Salernes. The driver of the jeep is the Salernes organizer Bertrand Prud'honne; Jean Mi and Eric are in the others.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



Hello,
Here are 10 pictures of Allan Johnson and Leo Dean in Southern France.
Kind regards,
Gilles





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Hello Bob, This may be of interest to the members and families of the 517th PRCT and others interested in the historical significance of our POW from WWII and the people who assisted in their safe return to our control.

Don Gentry

World War II

Escape From Enemy Territory Reports

73,000 pages composed of 2,950 Escape and Evasion reports, archived on 2 DVD-ROMs.

This DVD-ROM will be available for a limited time and will not be added to the PaperlessArchives.com complete collection.

To read the complete description, see sample pages, or obtain this set go to:

<http://www.paperlessarchives.com/wwiiescapeandevasionreports.html>

Over the course of World War II thousands of American Air crewmen survived the crash of their aircraft into German controlled territory. Mostly in France, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Denmark, and Hungary. Many successfully evaded capture by German troops or later escaped from German prisons. The servicemen used their evasion and escape training and their escape kits to aid their self-extraction from enemy territory. Many times they were aided, at great risk, by local civilians, and the French, Belgium, Dutch, Czech or other national partisan resistance organizations.

The Gestapo searched for those aiding the escape of allied personnel. Hundreds of the "helpers" who got American servicemen back to allied territory were sent to concentration camps or were executed. The servicemen also put themselves at risk. Their attempt to return, instead of waiting out the war in a POW camp, often involved ditching their uniforms and wearing civilian clothing. This meant that they lost protections under the Geneva Convention, and if captured could have been executed as spies. Those who managed to walk out of German occupied Europe were referred to as belonging to the "blister club."

By October 1942, allied intelligence had set up a system to gain intelligence from the returned. They were usually sent to England to be debriefed by intelligence officers. They were immediately sworn to secrecy about their experiences. They signed a document that included the statement, "Information about your escape or your evasion from capture would be useful to the enemy and a danger to your friends. It is therefore SECRET."

These reports are firsthand accounts of the experiences of many of those who made it back to allied controlled territory. They usually contain answers given to a brief questionnaire concerning the use of escape and evasion training and equipment; an interrogation form with unit designation, target information, number of missions flown, date considered missing in action, date returned to U.S. or allied control, country of escape or evasion, and a listing of crew members or other service personnel with official disposition; a verification of the identity and trustworthiness of escapee or evader; a certificate safeguarding prisoner of war and/or escape and evasion information; an



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

outline of topics to be covered in the narrative; and a typed or handwritten narrative that documented the escape and evasion experience of the escapee or evader.

Many of the evaders and escapees had spent weeks behind enemy lines. They had information about fortifications, results of allied bombing, its accuracy and the extent of bomb damage, military production, the condition of railroad lines, airfields, troop encampments, coastal and interior defenses, anti-aircraft batteries, radar installations, location of enemy factories and ammunition dumps, and enemy and civilian morale that could only be had by someone who had spent time on the ground.

The reports contain information about the use and effectiveness of escape tools provided to the aircrew. Survival kits were packed into small satchels often referred to as their "purse." Evasion purses were custom-made for specific areas, they contained escape maps, compasses, local currency and escape saws. They contained passport type photos of the airmen in civilian clothing to be used to create fake identification if the crewman were to enter one of the escape lines. The kits contained "Pointie Talkies" and phrase cards to aid in communication with local civilians. An Airman would point to the words and phrases and followed instructions on pronunciation contained in a "pointie talkie" or on a phrase card. Blood chits inside the kits read, "I am an American, misfortune forces me to seek your assistance..." Blood chits offered a reward to those who provided assistance. They also identified a flier's nationality and carried messages in several languages that requested aid. Each blood chit was individually numbered to identify specific aircrew.

The kits also contained Benzedrine tablets to give "energy" to the airmen so they could pursue their escape.

After returning to duty many evaders or escapees had terrific stories that they were forbidden to tell. They often bought a custom-made "Winged Boot" patch at Hobson and Sons in London. This was an unauthorized uniform item, so it was worn under the left-hand coat lapel.

CHUCK YEAGER

The subject of one Escape and Evasion report is Flight Officer Charles Yeager, better known as Chuck. Chuck Yeager after the end of World War II piloted the first aircraft to break the sound barrier. Later he became the first to fly mach 2. On March 5, 1944, Flight Officer Yeager's P-51 Mustang was shot down over France. French civilians took the wounded pilot, changed him into civilian clothing and hid him in a barn. He was then placed into a French escape network. Twenty-three days and 100 miles later Yeager crossed the Spanish border.

It was regulation that evaders and escapees would not be allowed to fly over enemy territory again. Many of the returned had knowledge about Resistance allies. The military did not want to risk that this information could be extracted by the Germans.

Yeager was able to speak face to face with Allied Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower on June 12, 1944. He argued that he should be allowed to return to combat because with the Allies' invasion of France, French Resistance members were openly fighting alongside Allied troops, so there was little or nothing he could reveal if shot down again that would endanger those who had helped him flee. Eisenhower got permission from the War Department to allow



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Yeager to return to combat. After he returned to his unit he was credited with shooting down 10 1/2 more German aircraft.

Other Reports include:

Escape and Evasion Report Number 759 - Captain Jack Ilfrey

Captain Jack Ilfrey, from Houston, Texas, first escape is not captured by an E&E report. In November 1942, on a ferry flight from England to North Africa, Ilfrey's plane had a fuel malfunction and he was forced to land in Portugal. Portugal was neutral during World War II. Portuguese officials seized his P-38 and interned Ilfrey. Later he was taken to his plane to instruct the Portuguese how to fly the now refueled aircraft. While sitting in the cockpit Ilfrey quickly started it up, took off and flew it to Gibraltar.

On June 12, 1944, six days after the Normandy invasion, Ilfrey was shot down by anti-aircraft fire over Angers, France. A French family hid him in their home for two weeks. He was given fake identification papers and a bicycle. Ilfrey's new identity was that of a deaf and mute French farmer named "Jacques Robert." He then set off on the bicycle to begin his attempt to make a 150 mile trek to the lines in Normandy wearing a beret, old French slippers, Dutch trousers that buttoned up the side, a green shirt, and a blue jacket.

The road he took was well traveled by German soldiers. During his journey a German soldier on foot ordered him to stop and tried to take his bicycle. He held on to the bike as the soldier tried to take it away, saying in French "mama and papa". The soldier gave up as a truck load of German soldiers passed by and the soldier hitched a ride. Further down the road he stopped at a farmhouse and asked a Frenchman for water. After the Frenchman gave him the water, he began asking Ilfrey questions. Ilfrey pointed to his ears and said, "sourd," the French word for deaf. Further down the road he came across two German soldiers carrying a third soldier, whose leg had been shot off. When they attempted to take his bike, he again said in French "mama and papa," but this time it had no effect and they commandeered the bike.

Further north down the road, now traveling by foot, a group of German soldiers emerged from a wooded area and dragged him off the road and forced him into their trench. Ilfrey assumed that they thought he was a Frenchman, with Allied patrols near, they thought he might give away their position. When he tried to leave the Germans prevented it. He remained in the trench with the German soldiers for two hours as British shells landed nearby. One of the German soldiers in the trench was hit in the stomach by a shell fragment. The Germans put him in a wheel barrel and ordered Ilfrey to take him south down the road to a German field hospital. When he arrived with the soldier at the medical station the attendants gave Ilfrey chocolate and cigarettes and told him that he should continue heading south to Fontenay. From there he went west to Tilly. A French farmer told him that there were allied troops outside of St. Pierre. While walking on a dirt road he could see British helmets over the top of hedges. He heard someone yell in English to get that Frenchman out of the way. A British sergeant grabbed him from behind a hedge. After indentifying himself as an American flyer, he was sent to a forward headquarters.

Escape and Evasion Report Number 800 - Major Donald Willis

Maj. Willis' plane was struck by anti-aircraft fire while flying over German occupied Holland. His plane crash-landed in the middle of a Dutch soccer game, scattering 500 players and spectators.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

After exiting the plane he began to leave the area under the confusion. He came upon a group of bicycles and a jacket; he took a bike and covered himself with the jacket. He began to ride down a road and passed an arriving German patrol. He spent the next several days sleeping in barns and haystacks. He accidentally wandered into a German anti-aircraft battery and was shooed away by a soldier who thought he was a Dutch civilian.

Escape and Evasion Report Number 521 - Second Lieutenant Robert Laux

After parachuting over Amiens from the plane he was piloting Laux, a mail clerk from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, came across a French woodcutter who gave him civilian clothes. Laux headed south in an attempt to reach Spain. While walking down a road a German on a motorcycle stopped, raised his hand, and shouted 'Halt!' Laux said that he thought that the German was saluting him, so I gave him the Hitler salute back. Later a number of truckloads of Germans passed, he gave heil Hitler salutes to them all of them and they returned his salute.

The next day while Laux was looking at signs at a crossroads a German staff car full of heavily armed MP's pulled up. Laux began to walk away when one German motioned for him to come over. The German said something to Laux in French which he could not understand. Laux said in his report that, "I looked dumb." The German repeated what he said, this time slowly. Laux pointed down the road and car drove off. Further down the road Laux showed a French woman his phrase card and she hid him in a barn. The French Resistance then set him on an escape route.

Escape and Evasion Report Number 904 - Second Lieutenant Eugene Squier

Co-pilot 2nd Lt. Eugene Squier, a dental technician in civilian life from San Francisco, California, was forced to parachute from his plane after it was hit on the way to bomb a railroad bridge at Nantes. After being aided by several civilians, two days after ditching, an elderly couple approached him as he was walking down a road. They asked him if he was an American flyer. They told him they had contacts. They hid him in their chicken coup and told him they feared that their neighbors were collaborators. He was later taken to a safe house; however plans for his return were not able to be made. Three weeks later he heard that the Americans had taken over a nearby town, so he set off by foot. On his way he tried to stop a passing transport of American troops, but they would not stop since he was wearing civilian clothes. The next day a Frenchman told him that there were 11 Germans looking for an American officer so they could surrender. When Squier approached the Germans they did not believe he was an American. They would not give up their weapons because they feared the French would seek reprisal. They surrendered their weapons after he finally convinced them that he was an American and the Germans were locked up in the town jail.

To read the complete description, see sample pages, or obtain this set go to:

<http://www.paperlessarchives.com/wwiiescapeandevsionreports.html>



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 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