



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

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June 9, 2013

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

Lt. General Richard J. "Dick" Seitz



Lt. General Richard J. Seitz, age 95, completed a storied life on June 8, 2013 after suffering congestive heart failure. Born in Leavenworth, KS Feb. 18, 1918, he grew up in that city and then attended Kansas State University where in 1939 as a junior he began dating his first wife, Bettie Jean Merrill, a freshman. That same year Dick, foreseeing WWII looming on the horizon, accepted a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Army. Once in the Army he went through the sixth jump school class the Army ever had thus becoming one of its first paratroopers.

With the advent of the war, Dick rose rapidly until at the age of only 25 in March 1942, as a Major, he was given command of the 2nd Battalion of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team. Thereafter, he was promoted to Lt. Colonel and, as the Army's youngest battalion commander, led his battalion throughout its historic combat operations in Europe with the personal radio call sign of "Dangerous Dick."

The 517th was flung into combat at Anzio at the time of the breakout from that beachhead followed by fighting up the Italian Peninsula. They then made the combat jump into the southern invasion of France at 4AM, Aug.15, 1944 as the airborne element of Operation Dragoon with its subsequent heavy combat in the French Maritime Alps. Finally, put in reserve in Northeastern France in December 1944, Dick was drawing up Paris leave rosters for his men when Hitler launched the Battle of the Bulge.

At that point, Dick's 2nd Battalion was married with a Regiment of the 7th Armored Division to form what became known as Task Force Seitz. It was pushed in to plug the gaps on the north slope of the Bulge every time the Germans tried to make a breakout. In doing so, his battalion went from 691 men to 380 through combat losses in some of the worst fighting of WWII. The battalion went on from the Bulge to see even further bloody combat in the subsequent battles of the Huertgen Forrest.



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Before shipping out to Europe, Dick and Bettie continued to see each other whenever they had a chance to do so. In 1942, after graduating from Kansas State, Bettie joined the Red Cross and was subsequently sent to England in late 1943 to support the bomber groups of the Army Air Corp's 8th Air Force. In the fall of 1944, she was moved to Holland to run an Army rest and rehabilitation center. There in January 1945, she read in *Stars and Stripes* that Task Force Seitz was heavily engaged in the fighting around St. Vith. By herself, she drove from Holland to the front in Belgium and managed to find the Regimental HQ of the 517th. But they would not allow her to go on to the very front lines where Dick was. However, this put them back in personal touch which led to their marriage in June 1945 in Joigny, France with one Red Cross bridesmaid and 1800 paratroopers in attendance in one of the greatest love stories of WWII.

Dick ended the war with the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart plus what he most treasured besides his Parachute Wings, the Combat Infantryman's Badge. Thereafter, during his lifelong Army career including nearly 37 years of active duty he also received numerous other decorations and awards including the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit and the French Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honor. Along with these awards, his commands included the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503rd Infantry Regiment and the 82nd Airborne Division, which he led into Detroit and Washington, DC in 1967 to quell those cities' riots. He also commanded the XVIII Airborne Corps and was Chief of Staff US Army Vietnam in 1965 through 1967 under General Westmoreland. As a Portuguese speaker he served two tours in Brazil, the last as Chief of the Joint US/Brazilian Military Commission and one year in Iran as a military advisor. He likewise served in Japan with the occupation forces immediately after World War II.



Dick and Bettie retired to Junction City in 1975. Unfortunately, Bettie died of a heart attack June 1, 1978. Thereafter, Dick was blessed to marry Virginia Crane, a widow, in 1980. She also predeceased him in 2006. In retirement, Dick remained extremely active with the Army through Ft. Riley as well as in the Junction City Community and in Kansas generally. During the Iraqi and Afghanistan Wars he would go out to Ft. Riley to see off and greet the deploying and redeploying units from those fights, no matter the hour day or night. He was past Chairman of the Ft. Riley National Bank, very active with the Coronado Council of the Boy Scouts, a Trustee of St. John's Military Academy, on the Board of the Eisenhower Presidential Library, President of the Fort Riley-Central Kansas Chapter of the Association of the U.S. Army, and Chaired Junction City's Economic Redevelopment Study Commission among many other activities. He was also honored as an Outstanding Citizen of Kansas, received the prestigious AUSA Creighton Abrams Award, and most recently had the General Richard J. Seitz Elementary School named in his honor on the post at Ft. Riley. He felt a particular affection for the faculty and students of that school whom he visited as often as he could. The best way to describe Dick is that he lived his life "Airborne all the way!" to the very end.

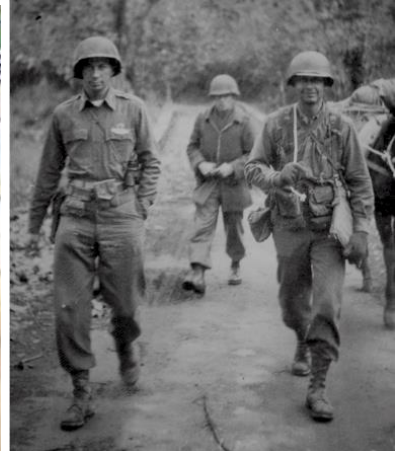


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He was predeceased by his parents, John Casimir and Florence M. Seitz, and seven brothers and sisters including Brigadier General Andrew Seitz (US Army ret. and former commander of Ft. Riley), Warrant Officer Edward Seitz (US Army ret.), Henry Seitz, Frances Gaddis, Helen Charles, Mary Ann Seitz and her twin Jane Marie Hardy. Dick was the fifth in this line of eight siblings.

Dick is survived by his daughters, Senior US District Court Judge Patricia Seitz of Miami, FL; Doctor Cache Steinberg (PhD) of Richmond, VA; Doctor Victoria Seitz (PhD) of San Bernardino, Calif.; son, Richard M. Seitz (USAF ret.) currently heading the US Coast Guard's C130 aircraft acquisition program, Washington, D.C., step-daughter Nancy Crane, of St. George, KS, son-in-laws Dr. Joel Steinberg MD and Alan Greer, attorney, granddaughter Jordan Christine Seitz, a senior at Arkansas State University and various nephews and nieces including Col. John Seitz US Army (ret.), Junction City, KS and Dr. Jim Hardy Superintendent of Schools in Chanute , KS.

Funeral and memorial arrangements are still pending. In lieu of flowers the family requests donations to either the LTG. Richard J. Seitz Veteran Scholarship at Kansas State University, St. Xavier Catholic Church, Junction City YMCA, or the Coronado Council of the Boy Scouts.





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I am so sorry to hear that Lt. General Richard "Call me Dick" Seitz has died. America has lost a true legend.

Dick Seitz has a list of accomplishments as long as all of our arms put together. He enjoyed connecting with everyone at reunions and attending so many events in Junction City. He was addressing the troops into his 90's, often speaking on the topic of leadership. Consistently, he would defer attention and credit to others, sharing the glory. He was generous with praise, and effusive in his delivery.

Those of us who had the privilege of hearing him in the past couple of years were all regaled with his delight at the school named after him, Seitz Elementary School at Fort Riley. He was thrilled to have been able to participate in the process of selecting their principal, and even the dragon was Seitz-recommended (albeit a bit tweaked for the younger kids - kind of a friendly-not-fierce dragon). He was especially complimentary of Samrie Devin, their principal there. He was not just a namesake - he had a personal relationship with the school community at Seitz Elementary, and even celebrated his 95th birthday there.



It was a joy to watch him receive the Legion of Honor at Arlington only a couple of years ago, and I was honored to be able to see him with his peers, who were so respectful of him and his accomplishments.



I will never forget him saying that the men of the 517th were the best ever to pull on a pair of jump boots. He said it repeatedly, but I heard it first in Savannah, and you should be able to watch it linked from our home page. He spoke often of character and its importance - timeless lessons.

Thank you to the Seitz family for sharing your father with us all these years. We mourn deeply our collective loss. We celebrate his life and his impact. We honor his service and his legacy.

-- Claire Giblin



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Lt. General Richard "Dick" Seitz died yesterday, and we have lost our last battalion commander of the 517th. He was a great man - an understatement by far.

Dick Seitz was a model - they just don't come any better. He was the ultimate gentleman. I greatly enjoyed meeting him at nearly every reunion we attended, and we all appreciated the fact that he attended our reunions so regularly. In fact, the high point of many reunions for me was the opportunity to speak with him, and he recalled so many details that clarified military actions decades later. He was generous with information and analysis, and shared freely his insights.



The 517's longevity can be attributed to the work of Dick Seitz at reunions and in his service on the Board, and to Ben Barrett, founder of the 517 website. Together, they assured a solid organization and continued reunions long after many other WWII outfits had ceased meeting. So many descendants of troopers have been able to make that connection across the generations, and

ensure that the legacy of the 517 is remembered and honored.

The photos of the anniversary celebrations in Le Muy from about 20 years ago reflect the importance of the Association's relationship with our European friends. There was Dick Seitz, donating his uniform and so appreciative of the work being done by Eric Renoux and Jean Michel Soldi in Provence. His jacket had been prominently displayed in the museum there, a solid show of support for their endeavor.

I had always thought of myself as a very ordinary soldier - a PFC who was only in service until the end of the war. After hearing Lt. General Seitz speak in Savannah, I left convinced that I was indeed one of "the best paratroopers ever to pull on a pair of jump boots."

Allan Johnson





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Lt. General Richard J. "Dick" Seitz

Feb. 18, 1918 – June 8, 2013