



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2171

August 4, 2013

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

Website
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2013 Roster (updated!)
Thunderbolt (Spring 2013)

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Lt. Edward M. Athey, H Company



Officers of H Company

Back row Lt. Dick Spencer, Lt. Irving Pinkston, Lt. O.G. Garrett, ~~two unknown troopers~~,
Lt. Howard Hensleigh, Lt. Steve Maciag

1st row, Lt McKillop, Lt. Hilliard B. Thomas (KIA Col De Braus), Lt Edward Athey

The names of the two unidentified troopers in the photograph of **Ed Athey** and other 3rd Bn. Lts. are Steve Maciag, without a T shirt and Howard Hensleigh

with one. The tops of our heads were cut off. OB Garrett ducked down and got his head in the picture. It was taken with others in the olive orchard near Frascati, Italy not too long before we took off for the jump into France.

That was a great tribute to Ed who certainly deserves it. His plane on take-off malfunctioned and caught fire. I saw this as my stick of troopers was in the plane just behind his. He gallantly got his stick, including Sgt. Harmon, out of the plane before it was engulfed in flames and then talked some glider pilot into letting him hitchhike into Southern France the next day to be back with the outfit. Our pilot swerved to the right to miss Ed's plane and then to the left to get back in the line of planes to continue down that dirt runway for take-off.

Highest regards, **Howard Hensleigh**

See: [Lt. Athey's story of Paratroopers in gliders - August 15, 1944](#)



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Howard,

Ha! I should have recognized your shirt. I have seen that photo before.

What does the P E M on the shirt stand for? And who are the two guys in this photo?

Bob B.



Dear Bob,

You catch all the important stuff. Those two guys were also in the other picture with **Ed Athey** and others – **Irv Pinkston** and **Dick Spencer**. All three of us went through 4 years of ROTC at Iowa U. The T shirt is a left over from Iowa; I never threw anything away. The PE stands for physical education; I'm not sure what the M is for.

Dick had an illustrious career as a journalist, first as a professor at Iowa U, where among other things he "invented" Herky the Hawk as mascot and started a course in cartoon journalism, and not too long after as editor of Western Horseman headquartered in Colorado Springs. He took on the task of designing our "logos", the buzzard for the 517th, the mule for the 460th and the airborne minesweeper for the 596th. He was wounded at Col de Braus in the G Co. attack/patrol on Ridge X, when **Art Ridler** was KIA. By the time we left S. France he filled the S1 (personnel) slot on 3rd Bn. staff. He made airborne Vmail Christmas cards for the entire outfit. He always seemed to have that portable typewriter with him and put it to use sometimes as the lead flew.

As you can see from these pictures, we were scared stiff about the upcoming Jump.

Howard Hensleigh

See more about **Dick Spencer's** life on page 12.



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Dick Seitz Funeral Service

Bob: by all means. Dad was so proud of the men of the 517th. They are "family" -- not only were they there for Dad and Mama's wedding, **Tom Cross** being the best man and **Col. Graves** giving away the bride, Uncle **John Lissner** was my godfather (although Dad once said -- given all the trouble Uncle John used to get into, he wasn't quite sure why he was!). Uncle John took his role very seriously, including sleeping under my crib (but that may have been after a little alcoholic sleeping aid!) He was a wonderful man and a part of our lives until his death. What a lift to know that John, Dad, Mama, and every other member of the 517th who have gone before us are reunited again. What a fabulous band of brothers. I am also sending you a copy of the program and my brother Rick's remarks in case you would like to see them.

Pat

Bob: here are my brother's remarks. Haven't persuaded my cousin, John Seitz, to put his on paper -- he was eloquent speaking from the heart about the last three years that he lived next door to him in Junction City. But his interview on the TV segment conveyed that heart. How blessed we were to have Dad as our father and to have had him as long as we did was a stellar gift from God. And the heartfelt comments of folks like you, your sister, the 517th family members as well as many others has been an amazing grace that lifts all of us up. Thank you. Pat

Good morning. I'm Rick Seitz. I am deeply honored that my family has allowed me to speak a few words about our father. That said... Whoa! Was that an amazing life we just witnessed?

Let's face it, here was a man who could do anything. Yes anything. And it started at an early age. When the nuns at his school in Leavenworth asked his father to provide transportation to take the kids to the annual school picnic, there, on the appointed day, drove up Dick Seitz in a huge truck, all by himself, at the ripe old age of 13. He said the nuns eyes got as big as saucers but they all piled on and off they went.

You all know he had a brilliant airborne career. What you don't know is it almost didn't happen. While he was attending the infantry school at Fort Benning, he saw the parachute test platoon going through its paces. When he returned to his unit in Utah, he requested to join the Provisional Parachute Group. However, his battalion Commanding Officer rejected the request saying in essence "Seitz, you have a better future here". Not satisfied with the status quo, Dad was able to get a set of orders directly from Washington much to the surprise of his battalion commander. Yes he could do anything.

And when it came time to enter WWII he was given command of the 2nd Battalion of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment at the age of 25, making him youngest Battalion commander in WWII. In his words he was a bit wild and reckless, but in his battalion commander called it youthful enthusiasm. He hand-picked each member of the new 800 man battalion and as legend has it, Dad would ask some of the interviewees to punch a hole in the wall to prove how tough they were.

His admiration for the troops of the 517th Regimental Combat Team knew no bounds. Time and again he called them the finest troops to ever pull on a pair of jump boots. Their actions during World War II in campaigns in Italy, the invasion of southern France, the battle of the Bulge, and the Huertgen Forest are the stuff of legends. I asked Dad what was the toughest thing he did in World War II. He said the invasion of southern France, landing miles from where you are supposed to be, troops scattered all over the countryside



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and in the dark trying to figure out where you were, all while people are shooting at you. Yes the man could do anything.

Because he could do anything, he had some great assignments culminating in commanding 18th ABN Corp at Fort Bragg. He had tours in Japan, Vietnam, Iran and two tours in Brazil. He spoke Portuguese like a native and even mastered basic Farsi. In 1961 he went back and finished his degree cramming two years into one. He said of that year away from home he studied a lot and ate a lot of frozen chicken pot pies. Funny, he never ate one again after that.

And after a brilliant 35 year career in the Army he brought that same can do anything spirit here to Junction City, where over the next 38 years he became involved in all sorts activities at the local, state and national level. Boy Scouts, Rotary, YMCA, AUSA, Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity, Saint John's Military School. He even found time to volunteer at the post hospital, and the list goes on.

He took a keen interest in mentoring young NCOs and officers at Ft Riley in leadership so that they too could do anything. His talks proved quite popular as his granddaughter found out during a flight into Manhattan where some young soldiers enthusiastically told her how General Seitz had come to their unit and inspired them. So, when I picked her up at the airport the first words out of her mouth were "Grand Dad is a Rock Star". Yes, he even attained rock star status.

He also wanted to make sure young people got the education they needed so they too could do anything. He firmly believed the fate of our nation rests on our youth and especially the teachers who not only educate but inspire students. When he was told they wanted to name the new elementary school at Fort Riley after him, he was originally against the idea saying there were others more deserving the honor. However, once he agreed, in true airborne style, he jumped in with both feet wanting to know every detail about the construction, the teachers, and the classes. I was told that during a tour of the school while it was under construction Dad barked "How many troops does this classroom hold?" Where upon he was gently reminded, "Sir, we call them students".

Once the school opened, he was out there every week with a box of chocolates and an apple for the teachers, reading to the kids. His wanted to ensure students knew how important an education is and that they needed to respect their teachers. He told me once and I quote "I wanted to be deeply involved in the school, not like those other guys who have had schools named after him and never bothered to show up, you know guys like Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln." A lot of credit for getting him involved goes to the Principle Ms. Devin, and because of it all the kids knew him, although not always the way you would expect. One of Dad's favorite stories was he talking to a teacher when the teacher asked one of her students "Do you know who General Seitz is?" Where upon the student puffed out his chest and proudly proclaimed "I sure do, he's named after our school."

He was a sharp dresser, a smooth dancer and on occasion, a sly practical joker. He was also a first rate gentleman, opening the door for others, standing up for ladies when they walked into a room, and helping with their chairs when sitting for dinner. And if you ever heard him speak, you know he could evoke passion and enthusiasm out of anyone he met.

He could do anything because he led his life following the basic character principles he set for himself of truth, integrity, sacrifice and self-control. Perhaps Myron Murley III, put his finger on it when he wrote, "He is the epitome of an airborne commander, great personal and moral courage". Yes, our father could do anything, and because he could do anything he was also the best father ever. Thank you.

Airborne All the Way!



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Bob: below as a Word attachment are my cousin John Seitz's notes that he used for his remarks at the funeral -- they came across so beautifully from the heart without a note. John has been very busy, so I don't have his exact remarks, but the notes pretty well cover the things he said. I made 3 minutes of remarks at the vigil but Rick and John did the heavy lifting and we were so proud of them. - Pat

Dick Seitz was more than my uncle. He was my big brother, surrogate father, neighbor and best friend.

Dick spent 15 or more years trying to entice me into moving to Kansas from DC and in May 2010 I finally made the move

When I arrived in JC, I lived with Dick for several months before moving next door

We went to the YMCA every morning when it opened at 5 or 6 AM to exercise, but later we could go 30 minutes later so we could "sleep in" He still ate breakfast at about 4 AM

We shared cooking dinner—altering until he realized I like cooking then he "allowed" me to cook more often

His definition of gourmet cooking was someone else doing the cooking—he especially enjoyed meals prepared by LaVonne or Nikki.

Every evening, Dick looked forward to calls from his kids—his kids were very special to him

We watched a lot of sports together—he was a great K-State and Royals fan--He was particularly critical of the Royals, but still very loyal. We even watched Mizzou games

Dick volunteered me to participate in a lot of community activities. When he judged me competent, I became his replacement in some of them

Then he complained that I was too involved and too busy, but he is the one who got me involved in many of the activities in the first place

We went to ceremonies and social activities together—I was the designated driver

Dick liked to ride in my truck—he could see better from it and it was comfortable for naps on trips to the KC airport

Dick was a classy dresser. It took a long time for him to accept that casual on an invitation did not mean you should wear a coat and tie

He didn't like company when he visited the doctor, although I did finally convince him that I should go and be his witness. He always took a box of Whitman Samplers for the nurses.

On one occasion, in the middle of the night, he called 911 to go to the ER, but insisted no siren or flashing lights—he didn't want to disturb the neighbors—especially me. I found out he was at the ER several hours later

Dick was very prompt in writing thank you notes—usually as soon as he got home from the event. He always took a gift for the hostess

He was intensely proud of Seitz Elementary School, its principle and the faculty--and visited frequently

Some of my favorites of his memorable quotes were:

- "Life goes on—deal with it"
- For an injury of any kind—"Rub a little dirt on it"
- "Tomorrow is always a holiday"--when you're retired



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- When questioned about his exploits in any book about the his World War II unit, the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment—"Don't believe a word of it, it's all lies"—then he confirmed and embellished the story with additional facts
- At Tyme Out Steak House, our favorite place for dinner, Dick would order a country fried steak and mashed potatoes—and then say "Make sure the gravy is hot!"
- And after we had finished dinner or happy hour —"CSMO" (Close Station March Order—an Artillery expression, probably from my Dad), or "Let's dismount and fight on foot" (an Infantry expression)

The bottom line is that Dick was an exceptional person in every respect. He was a national treasure! He appreciated all the things done for him, but disliked special attention. He was my hero and I will miss him and all the things we did together. His was a life to celebrate.

-- John Seitz

In Memory

#905
1/16/08-15/08
Printed in U.S.A.



Vigil Service
Lt. General Richard J. Seitz
St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church
Sunday, July 21, 2013
7:00 p.m.

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10	Dr. Victoria Seitz, Daughter
Psalms 27: 1, 4, 7, 8	Jordan Seitz, Granddaughter
1 John 3:1-2	Dr. Victoria Seitz, Daughter
Luke 2:25-32	Father Al Brungardt

Harpist
Jo Hardy, Niece-in-Law

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

"To laugh often and much... to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children..."

"To leave the world a better place... to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived...this is to have succeeded."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



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"82nd Airborne Song: The All American Soldier"

Put on your boots, boots, boots
 And parachutes-chutes-chutes
 We're going up, up, up
 And coming down, down, down.

We're all American and proud to be
 For we're the soldiers of liberty.
 Some ride their gliders to the enemy.
 Others are sky paratroopers.

We're all American and fight we will
 'Til all the guns of the foe are still.
 Airborne from skies of blue,
 We're coming through. Let's Go!

"Big Red One Song"

Toast of the Army
 Favorite Son: Hail to the brave Big Red One
 Always the first to thirst for a fight
 No foe shall challenge our right to victory.
 We take the field, a grand sight to see
 Pride of the infantry,
 Men of a great division
 Courage is our tradition
 Forward the Big Red One!

"The Army Goes Rolling Along"

First to fight for the right,
 And to build the Nation's might,
 And the Army Goes Rolling Along

Proud of all we have done,
 Fighting 'til the battle's won,
 And the Army Goes Rolling Along

Then it's Hi! Hi! Hey!
 The Army's on its way
 Count off the cadence loud and strong
 For where e'er we go
 You will always know
 That the Army Goes Rolling Along.


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In Loving Remembrance

Lt. General

Richard J. Seitz



February 18, 1918

~

June 8, 2013



Prelude Musical Selections Chosen From Among LTG Seitz's Favorites

Gathering Song ~ #590 "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

First Reading Ecclesiastes 3: 1-16

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 23

"Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life."

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10

Gospel Acclamation ~ #934 "Celtic Alleluia"

Gospel Reading John 14:1-6

Preparation of the Gifts ~ #418 "How Great Thou Art"

Communion Hymns ~ #434 "On Eagle's Wings"
 ~ #428 "Amazing Grace"

Remembrances

Dismissal "82nd Airborne Division The All American Soldier"
 "Big Red One Song"
 "Army Song"

Postlude "Alleluia" by Mozart

In Loving Remembrance

Lt. General Richard J. Seitz

Date of Birth	Date of Death
February 18, 1918	June 8, 2013
Leavenworth, Kansas	Junction City, Kansas

Mass of the Resurrection
 St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church
 Monday, July 22, 2013
 9:00 a.m.

Concelebrants
 Father Al Bramgardt
 Father Kerry Ninemire
 Chaplain Anthony Kazarnowicz

Eucharistic Ministers
 Dennis (Buz) Bruzina ~ Thomas S. Hollis

Reader
 Dr. Victoria Seitz, Daughter

Offertory Gift Bearers
 Jordan Seitz, Granddaughter
 Joshua Hardy, Grand Nephew

Remembrances
 John Seitz, Nephew
 Richard M. Seitz, Son

Musicians
 Lt. Jim Jimenez, Vocalist
 Mrs. Alexis Jimenez, Violinist
 Dr. Ferrell Miller, Vocalist and Pianist

Urn Bearer **Flag Bearer**
 Dr. Jim Hardy, Nephew Col. Mike Morgan

Honorary Pallbearers
 John Seitz Dr. Jim Hardy
 Ted Hayden John Trygg
 Mark Edwards

Military Honors
 Fort Riley Honor Guard

Inurnment
 Fort Riley Cemetery



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From <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2013/07/26/soldier-for-life-laid-to-rest.html?ESRC=eb.nl>

Military.com
NEWS

'Soldier for Life' Laid to Rest

Jul 26, 2013

Army.mil/News| by Amanda Kim Stairrett



To say retired Lt. Gen. Richard J. Seitz had a storied life is an understatement. Those lucky enough to come in contact with him in his 95 years surely heard the stories: one of the first Army paratroopers, youngest battalion commander in World War II, 4 a.m. combat jump into the southern invasion of France, Battle of the Bulge, Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, Vietnam.

But, it was the life he led after more than 35 years of military service that contributed to an unforgettable, lasting legacy in the Flint Hills of Kansas.

Seitz's Family, friends and loved ones gathered Monday, July 22, at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Junction City to honor and celebrate the man who lived his life following four basic principles he set for himself: truth, integrity, sacrifice and self control.

Seitz was born Feb. 18, 1918, in Leavenworth, Kan. He died June 8, 2013, in Junction City. His remains were laid to rest at the Fort Riley Cemetery alongside those of his first wife, Bettie, whom he began dating in 1939 after meeting at Kansas State University. Their love life in itself was storied.

With World War II looming, Seitz accepted a commission and quickly rose through the ranks. At the age of 25, he was named commander of the 2nd Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team, and shipped off to Europe.

Bettie joined the Red Cross in 1942 after graduating from Kansas State University and served in England and later Holland. In 1945, she read in "Stars and Stripes" about a Task Force Seitz experiencing heavy fighting in Belgium. She drove there alone and found the 517th. She wasn't allowed to go to the front lines, but word was sent for Seitz and he came back to meet her.

Five months after she read about Task Force Seitz in the newspaper, they were married in Joigny, France, with one Red Cross bridesmaid and 1,800 paratroopers in attendance. It was called one of the greatest love stories of World War II.

Bettie passed away in 1978. Seitz married Virginia Crane in 1980. She passed away in 2006.

Hundreds from the local, Fort Riley and XVIII Airborne Corps communities attended Seitz's funeral in Junction City, filling St. Xavier's pews. There they heard of his passion for mentoring young officers and noncommissioned officers at Fort Riley, for he never stopped being a Soldier, his son Richard M. Seitz said.



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Seitz truly epitomized what it means to be a Soldier for life, Maj. Gen. Paul E. Funk II, 1st Infantry Division and Fort Riley commander, said.

"Lt. Gen. Seitz set an example and lived by his principles and Army values his entire life," Funk said. "His passion, grace and leadership make him a national treasure and his contributions to this community will long be felt by those who had the honor of knowing him."

Because of Seitz's service, sacrifice and numerous years of service, his legacy is one all young paratroopers of the XVIII Airborne Corps live to emulate, Lt. Gen. Joseph Anderson said.

Anderson traveled to Kansas from Fort Bragg, N.C., for the services and presented Seitz's children with an American flag during the inurnment. Seitz never served in the "Big Red One," but throughout his career commanded the 2nd Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team; 82nd Airborne Division; and XVIII Airborne Corps.

After three decades of military service, Seitz brought his "can-do-anything attitude" to Junction City, his son Richard Seitz said. He was active in everything from the Boy Scouts to Fort Riley National Bank to Rotary to the Association of the U.S. Army.

"Whoa, was that an amazing life we just witnessed," Richard asked the crowd gathered at St. Xavier's for his father. "Here is a man who could do anything -- I mean anything."

Richard described his father as a sharp dresser, smooth dancer and, on occasion, sly practical joker. He was also a first-rate gentleman who opened the door for others, stood when a lady entered the room and helped seat them at the dinner table, Richard said.

"If you ever had a chance to hear him speak, you know he could invoke passion and enthusiasm out of anyone he ever met," Richard said.

Seitz's legacy lives on in those he mentored, including the hundreds of children who attended the Fort Riley middle school named for him in 2012. Seitz took the responsibility seriously, regularly visiting the school to interact with students and teachers.

He believed the fate of the nation rested on youth and the teachers who educated and inspired them, Richard said.

"He wanted to ensure they understood how important education is and to respect their teachers," Richard said.

Everyone Seitz touched benefitted by his hand, his nephew, retired Col. John Seitz, said. The general was more than just an uncle to John. He was a neighbor, surrogate father, best friend and mentor, John said.

"I'm going to miss him," John said during the service. "I'm going to miss our routine, but I'm going to celebrate his life because I think that's what he would have wanted, and I expect that you all will do the same."



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From **Kaare Allan Johnson**, 596

It was an honor to attend Lt. General Richard Seitz's funeral last month. **Nancy Fraser Armand** was the other 517 representative on hand. She met me at the airport and escorted me around to the hotel and everywhere else. She was a real trooper and I am grateful to her.

We were able to attend both the evening vigil and the funeral mass the next day. They were beautiful services and very well-attended. The church was full, and people from everywhere in his life came. I loved that two of my favorite hymns were played: Amazing Grace and How Great Thou Art.

Several current and retired officers were in attendance; I noticed the generals' flags (at the cemetery ceremony at Fort Riley) flying and met several of them. When they learned that I had served with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, I was amazed that two of these men shook my hand and told me it was an honor to meet me. I can only guess that Dick Seitz talked about us a lot and in glowing terms at that.

The services were a beautiful and fitting tribute to the man and the legend. And I don't throw around the term lightly. A local (here in NJ) acquaintance, it turns out, served in peacetime in the 82nd after Lt. General Seitz had departed. He advised me that Seitz's name was - literally - a legend oft and proudly spoken of.

He touched many lives and will be remembered with great affection.

Other MailCall News

Hello Bob and fellow 517th family.

My wife and I had a wreck on my motorcycle while riding in the Smoky Mountains on July 13th. I am now at home after being in the hospital for nearly three weeks. It is great to be home although I am still in much pain. I will be in a neck and back brace for at least another 6 weeks to avoid being paralyzed. My wife suffered from a bruised left arm and ribs and took good care of me and never left my side while I was in the hospital, thank God! She was better than the nurses at taking care of me. Thank all of you for your prayers and especially **Morris and Beverly McDowell** for taking the time to come and see me at the hospital in Knoxville Tennessee. The food there was the worst I have ever tasted in my life! I lost ten lbs in two weeks. I also want to thank Lory Curtis for calling me and putting me on the prayer list at his church. I am recovering slowly and so glad to be at home. It is very hard to sleep while wearing these braces. I sleep when I can and am thankful for the pain meds that allow me to do so. It's a wonder that I am even alive. I drove over a steep embankment at around 40mph. Carolyn climbed up the hill and a man and his wife saw her white helmet and stopped to help us. He happened to be a retired EMT and climbed down the hill and held my head until the ambulance and helicopter arrived and airlifted me to the hospital. I feel lucky to be alive and grateful for such a loving wife and friends. When I need inner strength I always think of my dad, the 517th and what they went through during WWII. That helps me pull through!

SOB
Rick Sweet



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Wanne - Trois-Ponts - 517 th monument

(sunday 2013 july 28th)

the Community of Trois-Ponts is taking care of the flowers and is looking to keep this area clean.

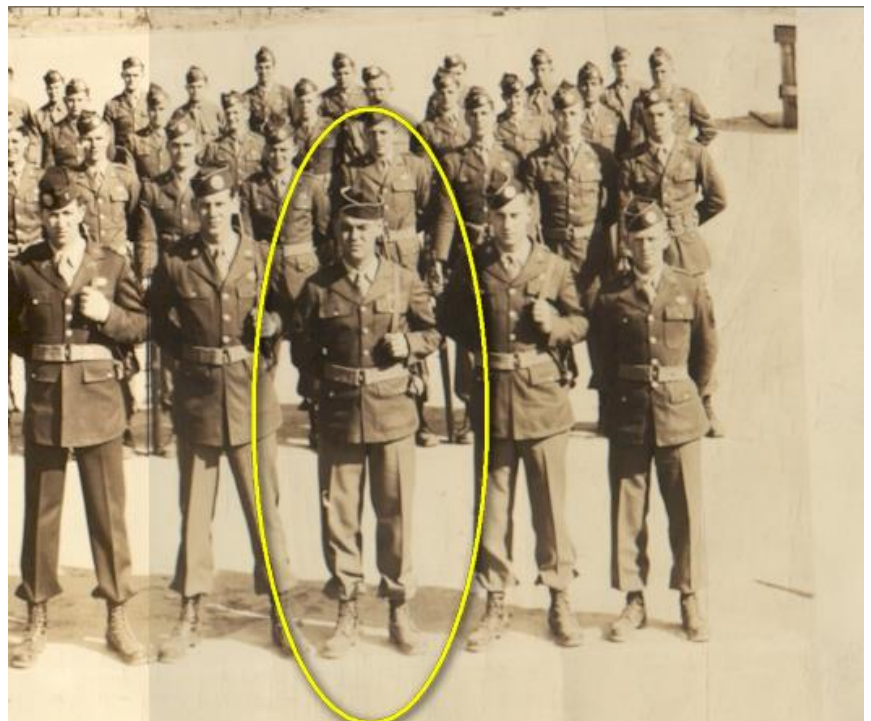
With our love from Belgium,

Irma and Arnold Targnion



I was just wondering how the Toccoa reunion went. I haven't seen any pictures posted on the site. Is there going to be another mini reunion in Palm Springs next spring? If there is, I'm pretty sure I can get Earl to go if there are going to be other F company troopers attending.

Look at this pic posted by **Ray Hess** to your site. I was looking at it with **Earl [Boone]** yesterday (he has the original in his room at the home) and we saw something funny. Look at the guy 3rd from right in the front row. He looks hung over, his hat is on backwards and his pants look like they were bloused by Ray Charles! Earl figured if any of the officers saw him he would have gotten his ass chewed!



http://517prct.org/photos/2nd_btn_dress.htm

Jim Kraus



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Hello, my name is Erik Rynders and my Grandfather **Al Kunzer** just recently passed away as you all know. He was a personal hero to me and an inspiration. I am trying to assemble a shadow box with duplicates of his medals and awards. I am pretty much set and have found most items. I am using duplicates as I wouldn't want to pick apart his uniform. I have a question you guys and gals might be able to help with. He was with the 596th and I am wondering what color oval patch would he have worn under his jump wings? Any help would be great!

Thank you very much,

Erik Rynders

We know that the 517th PIR wings oval is blue with a silver border:

But I have never seen a wings oval for the 596th. I don't know that any of these ovals were ever "official" Does anyone know the story? – BB



From: <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/patches/other/airborne2.html>

Most airborne units had a distinct oval cloth insignia worn under the parachutist or glider badge on the left breast. In 1941 when then Captain William P. Yarborough of the 501st Parachute Battalion returned to Fort Benning with the with the first 350 Parachutist's Badges there was a concern that the badges were small and did not stand out when worn on the uniform. To remedy this Captain Yarborough designed an oval background trimming to be worn under the badge and frame it on the uniform. The original trimmings used by the 501st were red with blue borders and were handmade of felt. During the course of the Second World War the original 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion was incorporated into the 503rd Parachute Infantry. Other airborne units were formed that adopted their own oval background trimmings in various color combinations. Army regulations existed that permitted units to adopt trimmings in addition to the familiar enameled crests distinctive insignia. Today the buff strap of the Third Infantry Regiment is the best-known of these regimental trimmings. In the course of the war the War Department suspended adoption of new trimmings and it does not appear that airborne background trimmings were officially approved by the War Department during the Second World War. Nevertheless, they were manufactured using regimental funds and widely worn. Background trimmings found their way into the official uniform regulations during the postwar period and are still proudly worn by airborne units today.

Airborne oval background trimmings existed for most of the parachute infantry regiments. In addition ovals in the colors of branches of service existed for other combat branches (such as the artillery one above) and also support troops within the airborne divisions and for headquarter units. An exacting tally of all of the trimming variations and units of the Second World War has not been published, but a good source of information is Les Hughes' article: "Cloth Airborne Insignia of WWII: A Primer" The Trading Post (LIV Jan-Mar 1995):33-40.



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In the notes and info about **Ed Athey** on page 1, Howard made mentions of **Dick Spencer** who attended the U. of Iowa with Howard. We all know that Dick created the 517th logos, and also the Herky the Hawk mascot for the University of Iowa. I recently ran across this story about Dick on the U of Iowa web site. – *BB*

A Boy Named **Dick Spencer**

Dick Spencer is one of those names from my youth that pops into mind a bit more frequently than do many others. I'm sure I would think of him even more if I still lived in the state of Iowa rather than in Michigan, where I have lived for more than half a century.

Why would that be true?

Well, Dick is the artist who created Herky the Hawk, that caricaturistic figure representing the University of Iowa Hawkeyes that everyone sees whenever a UI athletic team appears on television. In Iowa, I'm sure, Herky turns up much more frequently than he does in Michigan—or anywhere else for that matter.

During my attendance in 1989 at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of my graduating class of Roosevelt High School in Des Moines, I was quickly aware that Dick was not present and had no plans to be there. Within hours, I heard that someone had talked to him from his hospital bed in Colorado a day earlier, at which time he sent greetings to his classmates. Within weeks of the reunion, I received a phone call from someone who reported to me that Dick had passed away after a fight with cancer. I was sorry to have missed him at the reunion because he was one of my special friends from the time he arrived in Des Moines from his native Texas to live with his grandparents.



We must have been about ten years old when he first came to Des Moines. I don't remember exactly the year that the move took place. I had no idea why Dick came to live with his grandparents? Did one of his parents die? Did he become orphaned? Was there a divorce? Was the move to be temporary? I had no idea, and even less interest at the time and certainly no inclination to ask the question. All I knew is that I liked Dick and he liked me. You could say that "we really hit it off."



Dick had other childhood friends as well, for his magnetic personality attracted many others to him. One reason for that affection might have been his Texas accent, which was certainly different from that of an "Iowegian." Another reason might have been his sense of humor. He always kept us laughing and his interests were extensive.

I recall his love for riding his bicycle and the many long trips we would take around the Des Moines area. At least, those trips were long for a couple of ten- or twelve-year-olds. (In retrospect, I realize he probably enjoyed bicycle riding because it was a suitable substitute for the horseback riding that was apparently common for him back in Texas.)

Those trips included long rides to Commerce Park, waaaay out Grand Avenue, west of Valley Junction. Today, that area has been consumed by the city of West Des Moines and Commerce Park is probably part of someone's backyard. We probed the lake and river areas that were major parts of the park, and Dick would stir up rattlesnakes, which—to me—were frightening if not



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repulsive. He carried a hunting knife or two and impressed me with his ability to target a snake and pin him to the ground with one of his knives! Obviously, a talent perfected in Texas and one which I had little interest in pursuing. He'd put a couple of snakes in a sack, take them home, and produce belts. Now there was an industrious kid!

Dick's love of the outdoors was expressed in his interest in sports as well. We had vacant-lot football and other such games, but he enjoyed rainy day activities as well. When the game of Monopoly suddenly stormed upon the scene, we kids were right there with everyone else playing that board game. Sometimes at our house at 40th and Kingman Boulevard or at his grandparent's house at the southeast corner of 35th and Cottage Grove. We had great times together. Dick's talents went far beyond pinning snakes or horseback riding; he was a good student as well.

As one who played the piano while in high school, one of my interests was music and trying to see the Big Bands when they would play one-nighters in Des Moines. Dick thought it would be a good idea to try to interview some of the bandleaders. I had a knack of meeting and talking to people, he was an ambitious writer and on the staff of the school paper, and he thought we could be a good team to write up interviews and have them printed in the paper, the Roosevelt Round-up.

The major reason for Dick's presence on the staff of the paper was for his talent as a cartoonist, not as a writer, but Dick had a great talent for writing as well that, I suppose, began developing years earlier. We managed to produce several interview stories together.

One interview in particular that stands out in my mind was with Ted Lewis, one of the most popular entertainers of the day. Lewis had a great song and dance act utilizing a top hat and cane as integral props for the act. When we called him from the lobby of the Ford Des Moines Hotel, he very quickly said he would love to be interviewed and would come to the lobby to see us.



Lewis arrived off the elevator with his top hat and cane in hand, introduced himself (which he didn't have to do) and submitted to a myriad of questions as Spencer diligently took notes. After talking for some time, Lewis actually put on an act for us right there in the hotel lobby! I don't recall if a crowd gathered or not because I was so shocked and enthralled at this personal command performance that I failed to notice if there were others around. I suppose they did gather. It was hard to ignore such a performance, even though there were fewer people around the hotel lobby than might be the case today.

On the other hand, we had a cold and rude turndown by bandleader Henry Busse that served us as one of the realities of life.

Dick's talent as an artist, directed toward cartooning, made him well known to all the students and faculty. His friendly and outgoing personality, embellished with his sense of humor, endeared him to everyone who knew him.

As a matter of fact, the cafeteria at Roosevelt High, which also substituted as the study hall, had an impressive array of Spencer's original caricatures painted on each of the large support pillars. Today, I'm glad I had the foresight to take pictures of some of them. Remember that cameras were not as readily available then, especially when it came to taking pictures indoors. Color film was barely available, and, if it could be found, the cost was impractical. Of course, the pictures I took of the paintings were time exposures on black-and-white film





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Drawings on the pillars in the high school

Dick enjoyed himself most when he was drawing. He would draw caricatures of many of his friends on his class notes. I have a number of them and recall his doing the same for others, so there must be dozens of such drawings—if not hundreds or thousands of them! He took great joy in characterizing his friends in those numerous drawings, none of which were insults, but rather classic fun as Spence's expression of affection for others.

While in high school, Dick had an accident. A most uncharacteristic thing for Dick to do. It seems he tripped while ascending the stairs and his face came in contact with one of the steps above him, cutting his nose. The severity of the wound didn't seem to require any special

attention other than some light disinfectant and perhaps a Band-Aid.

That wasn't enough, however, for a rather severe infection set in and began to cause all sorts of problems for Dick. The infection, I'm told, touched his brain, which was probably the reason he fell into a long-term coma. Many of us went to see him at the Methodist Hospital in Des Moines and were devastated that such a thing could happen to this much-beloved guy.

Things became worse for him, necessitating an extremely long stay in the hospital. I hesitate to comment on the length of the stay, but it was many weeks. On a visit to see him after a week or more, I was shocked to see in the bed this yet-alive, but skeletal, figure that could scarcely speak. Dick was not tall, nor was he very heavy, but he could not have weighed more than 80 pounds when I saw him that day.

Probably the most difficult day of my life, up until that time, was the day I received a phone call from Dick's grandfather asking if he could count on me to be a pallbearer at Dick's funeral! Of course, I knew how bad he looked, but I couldn't imagine that he could be so near death.

Within the next several days, Dick took a positive turn toward recovery. His grandfather again called to give me the good news and I returned to the hospital to see Dick. Yes, indeed, he was better. He looked no better physically than he had the last time I saw him, but his positive attitude and smile made it clear to me that he was on the road to recovery. Dick missed nearly a year of school, so his high school graduation was postponed, making it possible for him to be in my class, which surely did not displease me.



Following graduation, Dick enrolled at the University of Iowa at Iowa City and I enrolled at Drake University in Des Moines, so that constant personal contact was suddenly interrupted. We corresponded, of course, and I was most pleased that we joined the same college fraternity (Alpha Tau Omega), although on different campuses.

At the university, Dick was most active in many areas. He became an officer in the ROTC; he was on the university swimming team; he was on the staff of the UI newspaper and yearbook, and I'm sure there were other things about which I am unaware.



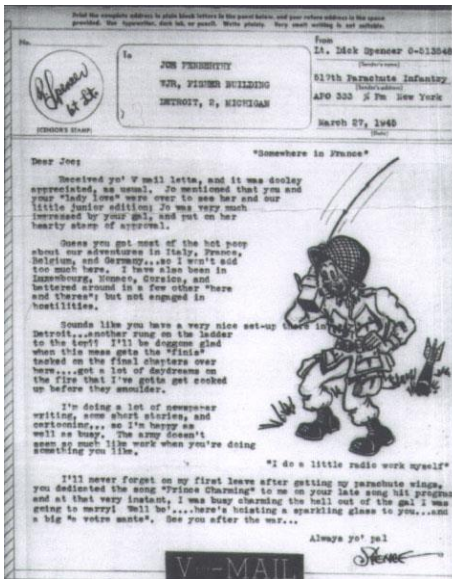
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The next interruptions in our lives were twofold. World War II postponed any plans we might have had; and I made a permanent move to Michigan. I saw Dick in the uniform of a paratroop officer several times before I moved, however. I can't help but comment on the fact that this one-time sickly, death-bound body now found itself in one of the toughest branches of the service! It was a bit embarrassing to me who was ineligible for military service for health reasons.

During the war, I frequently corresponded with Dick and, as one might suspect, his V-Mail letters were a joy to receive, each with an accompanying cartoon. He was a cartoonist for Stars and Stripes, a service publication for the troops around the world. I must reflect on the scrutiny that the censors gave to all letters from the servicemen overseas. Anything expressed in the content of a letter that might reveal a semblance of a military secret was eliminated.



Dick was very careful to avoid mentioning the location of any of his many exploits, as well as where he was at the moment; however, in one letter, he stated that he would soon be back into the thick of the action with another jump, carefully eliminating any mention of the location. In the corner of the letter was a drawing of a paratrooper in a diving configuration, diving toward a small sketch of an island that high school geography would help identify as Sicily! By the time I received the letter, the Sicily jump had been completed, but I then knew that Dick had had a part in it.



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He made four jumps into military engagements and I understand that he was wounded in all of them and took part in considerable hand-to-hand combat. One of his V-Mail letters, written from France, was of a morbid tone. He said he was paralyzed from the waist downward and he could not walk. His depression was most understandable, but like just about every other disagreeable circumstance he encountered, he recovered to enter a most productive civilian life. Which he most certainly did. His cartooning appeared in many newspapers and

magazines around the country; he taught at the University of Iowa; he was on the staff of the Colorado publication The Western Horseman, and, in later years, he became its owner and publisher.

As the years passed, my personal contact with Dick completely disappeared, although a now-and-then letter managed to come into play. Distance has a way of interfering with our lives, but certainly not as it once did in earlier times. I regret that I cannot continue with a more complete biography of Dick Spencer, but perhaps that's already been done. I hope so. He was such an outstanding and contributing person.

Joe Penberthy
Farmington, Michigan



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

517 PRCT Association, Inc.
c/o Joanne Barrett
70 Pleasant Street
Cohasset, MA 02025

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Soon is August 15, the 69th anniversary of Operation Dragoon. It is a good time of year to remember to pay your annual membership donation (only if you can afford it). Suggested donation: \$30

Enclosed is my annual dues contribution towards the 517 PRCT Association.

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