



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2195

January 5, 2014

*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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This Week in 517th History

During the daylight hours of January 4th, B and C Companies tried to get some rest. At about 0700 the Germans launched a small counterattack on B Company at St Jacques, using self-propelled guns accompanied by infantry. This was easily beaten off. For the rest of the day the Germans brought mortar and self-propelled gun fire down upon the area, but made no further attempt to advance. In mid-afternoon A Company and the balance of the Battalion arrived. The Aid Station and CP opened for business and ammunition was distributed.

Regiment urged **Colonel Boyle** to move to the high ground overlooking Bergeval, telling him that the 551st and 2/517 were already there. Despite this pressure Boyle decided to wait for darkness to make the move.

A broad stretch of open ground lay between Bergeval and the ridge. Moving across open ground in daylight had proven disastrous in too many recent instances. There was still no radio contact with the 551st or 2/517, and no accurate fix on their locations.

An hour before dark a long column of troops was sighted about a half-mile away on the ridge east of Bergeval. In the fading twilight it was impossible to tell whether they were American or German. They could not be contacted by radio, but this was not unusual. The best guess was that they were part of the 2nd Battalion moving south from Trois Ponts.*

* This may have been the reduced-strength 5th Parachute Regiment, or part of the 62nd VG falling back from the Mont de Fosse area.

At 1900 the Battalion began moving to the ridge, A Company leading, followed by the Command Group and C Company.** In the deep snow the move took several hours. At about 2200 A Company arrived in position. **Colonel Boyle** ordered C to pass through A, and **Lieutenant Howard Bacon** with a patrol to contact the 551st on the south.



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** B Company was left to secure the St Jacques-Bergeval area.

In a half-hour **Bacon** returned with his patrol. He had gone a half-mile south and found the area empty: no 551st, no Germans. Deciding to make a personal check, **Boyle** retraced the route with **Bacon** and the patrol. It was as reported. His right flank was wide open.

Meanwhile C Company had passed through A, moved north for two hundred yards, and discovered German communication wire along an east-west trail. Engines were heard starting up on the west, and a German soldier pulling a sled stumbled into the Company and was captured. It all seemed to indicate an enemy force on the left, behind the Battalion. The Company formed a perimeter and sent a patrol west to investigate.

* * * *

With A and C Companies in position, **Colonel Boyle** decided to return to Bergeval to coordinate efforts to find the 551st. With Intelligence NCO **Bob Steele** and two others he moved down the hill. As they reached level ground and headed for Bergeval they were challenged in German and dove for the ground. A burst of automatic fire ripped into the group from a few feet away. **Colonel Boyle** was hit three times. A few seconds later a tremendous racket of fire broke out to the northeast, in the direction of C Company.

* * * *

Moving down the trail to the west, the C Company patrol found a manned 76mm antitank gun. Behind it was a half-track with the engine running. **PFC Herb Loken** fired a bazooka. The gun and half-track were put out of action, and the crew killed or wounded. Another half-track started up and rumbled east, passing through the entire company. Not a shot was fired. Too startled to react, the troopers were thrown off-balance by a large white American star on the side of the half-track. An MG 42 opened up from fifty feet away, ending all doubt. Five men were hit. A second 76mm gun joined in, firing at almost point-blank range. C Company responded with fire and dug in furiously, pushing aside the snow and hacking at the frozen ground. Battalion was called by radio, without success. **PFC Bill Quinn** was sent to the Company command group to act as a runner .

Quinn was told to go to Bergeval and tell **Colonel Boyle** that the Company had run into a large enemy force on the left flank. If possible, Battalion should send another company around to hit the enemy from the east. **Quinn** crawled off toward Bergeval. Unknown to C Company, he was captured.

* * * *

Bob Steele leaned over his prostrate Battalion commander. **Colonel Boyle**, badly hit and going into shock, said, "Go to Bergeval and tell Major Fraser C Company is in a big fight on the ridge."

"I'm not leaving without you," **Steele** replied.

"I gave you an order. Leave me and go on to Bergeval."

Steele thought quickly. **Boyle** was far too big to carry. The only way to move him was going to be to get him angry, to injure his pride.

"Your trouble, Colonel," he said, "Is that you don't have the guts to help yourself."

An enraged **Boyle** came to life. No one talked to him like that. He struggled to his feet, and leaning on **Steele**, hobbled into Bergeval.



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MailCall News

Hi Bob...a belated Merry Christmas to you and your family....and all Best Wishes for a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

Joe David Brown was a good friend of mine, but lost track of him after the war...actually, he was wounded and evacuated to England for recovery. Joe was quite a bit older than the average trooper, being born in 1915, the rest of 'kids' born about 1924. I asked my daughter to get me a copy of Kings Go Forth for Christmas, which she did, along with Paper Moon. I'd seen both of these, along with Stars in my Crown many, many years ago. I decided to look up Joe on Wikipedia and found his bio which contains a slight error. It states he was with the Air Corps, and jumped into France on D-Day/ June 6, 1944.

I'm a novice when it comes to computers, and always will be, but is there any way we can correct this to show he was in Hq Btry, 460th PFA/517th PRCT and jumping in Southern France Aug 15, 1944.

I was born about 60 miles south of Birmingham, where Joe was born and raised. I was engaged to a B'ham young lady who lived right across the street from **Herbert Jeff**. Herb, Joe and I, with our mutual backgrounds, became good friends. As an added note, when I was Personnel Officer of the 501st, in the 101st in 1957-58, I organized a processing scheme with everyone participating in order to get our unit ready to go in a one hour notice. This included making dog tags, getting shots, dental records updated, with the S-2 checking our famed 'loyalty statement' and the S-3 checking for proper qualifications. We also made plates on an addressograph machine for each trooper to expedite proper manifests and last minute changes, as well as an equipment plate to be carried by the driver/operator showing identification, weight, etc. It was such a success it was adopted by the Division (the AG Major who recommended this to the Div staff got a Legion of Merit for his 'idea'!!!

To make a long story short, as I was the last one in line to double check the records, I paused when I came to one that said **Joe D Brown**...looked up, there was a lanky, red headed kid, who looked a lot like Joe, so I asked him if Joe David was related...said, "Yeah, he's my dad!!!"

If you have a way to correct his Wikipedia summary, would appreciate it.

Bob, you do such a fantastic job with the research and publication of the Mail Call, I have no idea how you have the time to do it....but glad you are carrying on your Dad's legacy,.

Hope to see you in Kissimmee....and in France in August of next year!

Airborne,

phil mc spadden

PS from Phil: Air Corp is great, but not up to Paratrooper standards! Thanks again, phil



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Good catch on Wikipedia, Phi. Yes, I do know how to do edits on Wikipedia. I logged in and made the following changes.

Previous version:

In 1939, he began working for the New York Daily News, but his time there was interrupted in 1942 by World War II, in which he served in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Brown was one of the first men to parachute into Normandy, France, for the June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion, receiving a battlefield commission as second lieutenant and being awarded the Purple Heart and Croix de Guerre with Palm.

Revised version:

In 1939, he began working for the New York Daily News, but his time there was interrupted in 1942 by World War II, in which he served in the **460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion (460th PFAB)**. Brown was one of the first men to parachute **into Southern France, in August 1944**, receiving a battlefield commission as second lieutenant and being awarded the Purple Heart and Croix de Guerre with Palm.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_David_Brown

If anyone else notices any errors in Wikipedia about the 517th, 460th, or 596th, let me know and I will make sure that they are corrected.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/460th_Parachute_Field_Artillery_Battalion_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/460th_Parachute_Field_Artillery_Battalion_(United_States))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/517th_Parachute_Infantry_Regiment

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/517th_Parachute_Regimental_Combat_Team

Note: The 596th PCEC does not have a separate entry on Wikipedia. I did start a page many years ago, but I was told that it had to be removed since the 596th is considered part of the 517th PRCT, and unlike the 517PIR and the 460th PFAB, the 596th never existed previously or after as a separate unit, therefore their history has to be reported as part of the 517th PRCT.

-- BB

Seeing pictures of then & now of towns in France sure brought back memories. happy New Year to y'all. Had to get that Texas draul in there!

Melvin Trenary



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Grosseto, Italy

Good afternoon! My wife and I travelled this past September to Tuscany.

We spent the better part of a day attempting to retrace the movements of the 517th on the day her Uncle, **Andrew "Bud" Murphy** was KIA.

We started in Istia D'Ambrone, outside of Grosseto looking for the "bridge". We later came to read that the bridge was constructed temporarily to allow troops to cross.

Once in Istia, we followed the field map (see below) and attempted to match up coordinates with my GPS on an iPad.

Heading north (approximately 1 KM), we believe we located the farm house where the German troops were laying fire on the 517th.

In all, it was a very moving experience for both of us.

We felt humbled to be given the chance to visit Istia and honor a man we never met but whose memory can still evoke tears so many years after he gave his life in defense of his country.

Brendan Monaghan





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*We wish everyone a prosperous
New Year in good health and
may all your wishes come true!!*

*We will toast to all our family,
friends and acquaintances!*

*God bless all our veterans past
and present.*

Ronald, Chantal and Cynthia

www.relivehistory44-45.com



Ronald Stassen
Aalkeborg 33
6228 BV Maastricht
The Netherlands
M. +31.623298299
ronald@relivehistory44-45.com
www.relivehistory44-45.com





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Here is another **John Lissner** story, as reported by **Tom Cross** in *MailCall* #559, Oct 4, 2003:

I liked **Randolph Coleman's** Co F story about **John Lissner** in Nice at the Negresco Hotel. It is typical Lissner.

Dick Seitz and I were sharing a Lissner story the other day about John Lissner being detailed to pay the Co. F Troopers that were in the Hospital In Nice on a payday. This happened after we came off the mountains outside of Nice and were encamped at La-Colle-Sur- Loup.

It goes like this: John was overdue from his assigned task of paying the troops in the Hospital in Nice so **Dick Seitz**, knowing John well and sometimes a willing accomplice in John Lissner's and **Carl Starkey's** (Co D) off-duty capers, asked me to go into Nice and make sure I brought John back with me.

I took off for Nice and found John and friends at one of the five Bistros, Restaurants, and/or Hotels that were On-Limits to Officers, the rest being Off-limits per **Major General Frederick's** orders. Fredericks, as you know, was CG of the 1st Airborne Task Force. I found John sitting amidst his buddies well on the way to having a good night on the town. I told John what my instructions were from the Battalion Commander and not getting any acknowledgment or response proceeded to pick him up using the fireman's carry to get him out of the place. I got as far as the exit door where I mistakenly set him down to open the door. He bolted back to his buddies and resumed the activities upon which he was previously engaged. Making a quick estimate of the situation and knowing John as I did I decided to join his gang so I could at least keep an eye on them as the senior officer present. I do not recall much after that other than we all got back to La Colle OK. I attributed our good fortune, with no reprisal, to my sly comment about the Battalion C.O. being a "sometime willing accomplice" earlier in this account.

As a footnote let me add that the CG of the 1st ABTF knew that if he restricted his officers just to a few On-Limits places he could always get hold of them or so he thought. I believe this was the only time in the ETO, in my experience, where the Officers were restricted and the rest of the gang had an "Open City." Don't know why I am telling all this but Randolph's comments set me "beguiling,"

Regards, **Tom Cross**



Tom Cross and John Lissner

Somewhere in Nice



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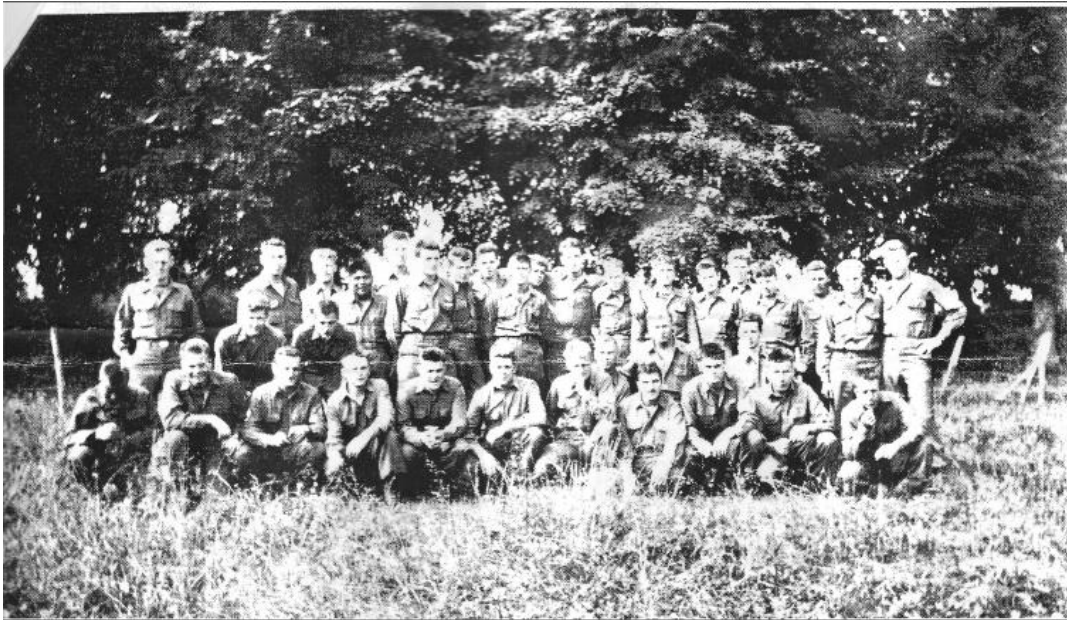
Gentlemen,

Could you please let me know if any of you have a better scanned image of the attached photo? It was taken at La Colle Sur-Loop after the march back from Sospel. Hopefully you have one with better clarity and definition. It is one I would like to enlarge for the family.

Best regards,

Bill Davis

Thanks for getting back to me. Apparently I'm not going to be much better with emails in 2014 than I was in 2013. I suspect I would be better with simply a #2 Farber pencil and a Big Chief tablet. None the less, I'll try this with an attachment this time.



B Company at
La Colle Sur Loup

My dad was **Billy Davis**, the tall guy on the far right. **Clark Archer** had sent me a copy of B/1/51th Bulletin of the Battling Buzzards dated December 1991. I would love to see what the detail and clarity of the original picture/scanned image was. Clark sent me a number of items before his death (maps, reports, etc.). I need to dig them out, scan them and get them off to you. Dad had a couple of photos that might be of interest to you as well.

Dad turned 21 on Dec 23rd 1944. I had his all of his grand kids/great-grand kids read the chapter "The Christmas Season" in the Battling Buzzards on his birthday to remember and appreciate what these guys went through when they were younger than the grand kids are today. They were pretty impressed.

Thanks for your help with this. Let me know what I can do to repay you for your efforts and time.

Best regards,

Bill G. Davis



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Hi Bill,

Thanks for the note. I would like to include it in next week's MailCall news, if you are OK with that. I will also add that photo to the web site.

I do not even recall seeing that picture of B Company before. (I could be wrong.) We have lots of other B Company photos, of course, including many at http://www.517prct.org/photos/harry_a_hill/harry_hill.htm, but I don't recall that one. This is only part of B Company. Do you know which group (Platoon?) I will also ask in the MailCall if anyone has an original of that photo that we can rescan.

I see on the Christmas 1944 roster that there is a Pvt. "Billie F. Davis" listed in B Company. Is that your Dad?

And yes, please send me any info, photos, or stories that you can. I would especially love to have his bio on our Meet the Troopers page: <http://517prct.org/bios.htm>

Thanks,

Bob Barrett

Please feel free to use the email and yes, **Billie F. Davis** was in fact my dad. There was a picture of him in the Battling Buzzards with **Stan Rozwood, John Garcia, Doc Keen, Don Strange** and **Steve Wierzba**. He was in 1st platoon, Company B of the 517th.

I'll try to get something to you in the near future. I'm attempting to close the books on year end for a couple of companies I am involved with and will be traveling for a while on business. When the dust settles, I will see what I can dig up and send you.

All the best,

Bill

RIGHT: Before boarding a 40 & 8 en route to Soissons, John Garcia, Billy Davis and Doc Keen lean on Sgt. Don Strange, Stan Rozwood with top hat and Steve Wierzba at left. (Courtesy Charles Keen)





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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

Only 2 weeks until Kissimmee!

**Florida mini-reunion
January 18-20, 2014
Kissimmee, FL
[Registration Form](#)**