



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2208

April 6, 2014

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

Website
Send MailCall news to
MailCall Archives
2013 Roster (updated!)
Thunderbolt (Winter 2014)

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MailCall News

My dad, **John Stonis**, just celebrated his 90th birthday. Here is a picture of him at his birthday party and then a picture (with a friend) while he was in Company A (or maybe H, he was in both). He is still driving (yikes) and going strong!\

Juliana Stonis



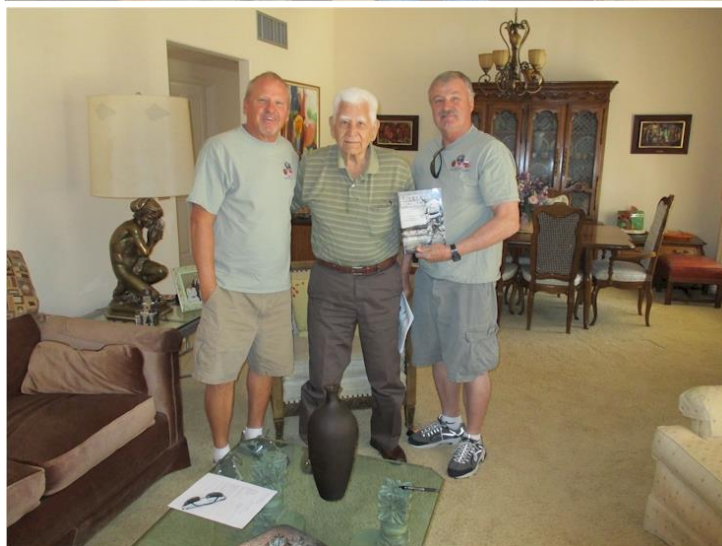


517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Last week I went out to my mailbox and saw a Thunderbolt returned to me because the address was incorrect. Well, I said this trooper needs his Thunderbolt so I got on a plane and flew down to Tucson to hand deliver the Thunderbolt to **Marshall "Mark" Baird of A Company**, 1st Battalion. Okay, maybe I am fibbing just a little bit. I did go to Tucson to visit my son and his family and meet my brand new granddaughter, she is # 15. Also my brother Tim lives in Tucson and he made arrangements for us to visit with Mark and his daughter Mandy for about an hour. It was great meeting him and talking about the 517th.

Then the next day we went over and visited with **Joe Clark of HQ, 1st BN** and his son Mark. Joe was with my Dad in HQ Company, and knew him. It sure was good seeing Joe Clark again. I met him at the 2006 reunion in Portland, then again in Washington D.C. in 2007 and finally when he came to the reunion in Salt Lake City in 2009. We gave Joe a copy of the Thunderbolt and the book Letters Home a Paratrooper's Story. See the attached pictures of these two great 517th troopers.

Lory Curtis





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

I didn't find anything like this on your web page. I thought it would be nice to add these pictures to the 517th archives.

I have no affiliation to this collection or to Mr. Ebert.

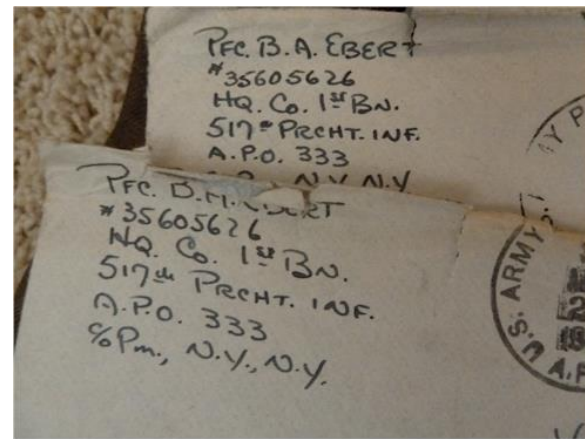
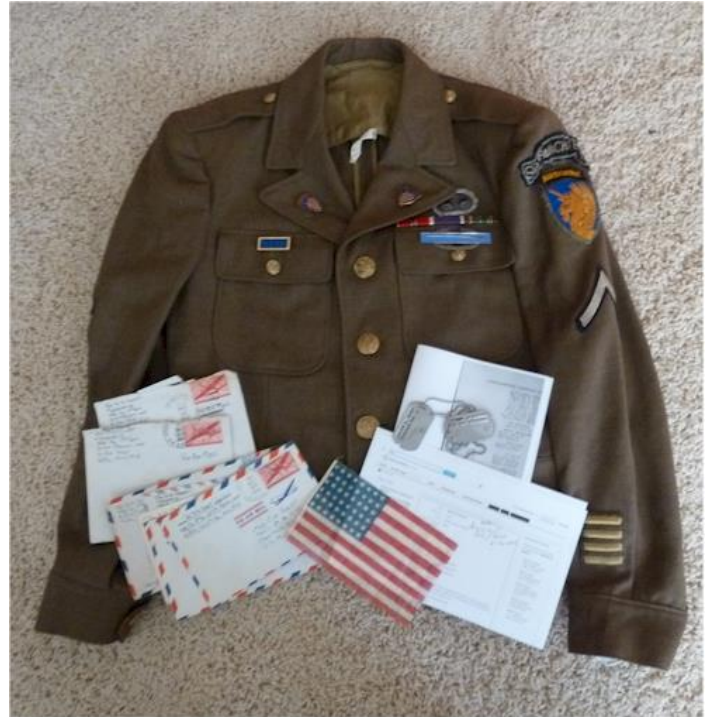
Thanks

Mike DeCroix

<http://www.ikesgrunt.com/World-War-Two-militaria.html>

Item #654 "Wonderful identified grouping to Burton Ebert of the 517th PIR"

PFC Burton A. Ebert, HQ/1





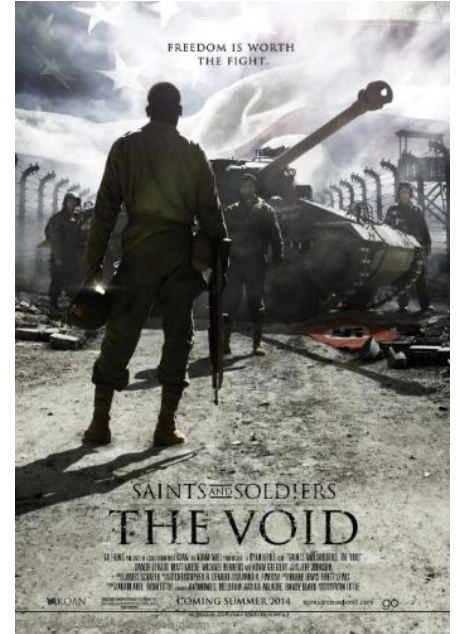
517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

The international trailer for *Saints and Soldiers: The Void* is now on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LswXs56_5t4

As you should all remember, this is from Go Films, the company that produced *Saints and Soldiers: Airborne Creed*, which is based on some events of the 517th in France, with **Harlan "Bud" Curtis'** character in a lead role.

My only concerns about the new trailer are that the actors are all too good-looking and the tanks are all spotless clean. Definitely not paratroopers. -- BB



From: **First Airborne Task Force ; The Forgotten Paratroopers**

After the World War Two several soldiers became historians of the unit in which they served.

Après la seconde guerre mondiale, de nombreux soldats sont devenus les historiens de l'unité sous laquelle ils avaient servi.

- Charles Doyle - 509th Parachute Infantry
- Dan Morgan - 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion
- Clark Archer** - 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment
- Robert Burhans - First Special Service Force

Doyle, Archer & Burhans participated to the liberation of the French Riviera between August-November 1944.

Doyle, Archer et Burhans participèrent à la libération de la Riviera entre août et novembre 1944.



Charles Doyle
509



Dan Morgan
551



Clark Archer
517



Robert Burhans
FSSF



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Subject: Info about Harvey Howard Epley

Does anyone have information about Harvey Howard Epley, aka "Duke" he was a member of the 517 paratroopers, saw combat in Italy, France, Battle of the Bulge, and Germany. His daughter is my wife.

Thanks,

Sam Pedicone

Hi Sam,

We know that **PFC Harvey H. Epley** was with the 517th PRCT, as a member of B Battery of the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion (460th PFAB). He is listed on the Christmas 1944 roster: <http://517prct.org/documents/xmas1944/xmas1944.htm>

I have not yet found any other specific mentions of Harvey Epley in my (incomplete) records, but you can read about the 460th in other articles.

There is a short history of the 460th at: http://517prct.org/documents/short_history/460_short_history.htm

The full history of the 517th can be found at: http://517prct.org/documents/odyssey/odyssey_history.htm

Also, there are a couple of books and journals written by members of the 460th, and I just received an 84-page journal from a member of C Battery that I will be putting on the website soon.

And there is also a fictional movie which takes place around the 460th actions in Southern France: "Kings Go Forth" was written by **Joe David Brown**, a member of the 460th. It stars Frank Sinatra and Tony Curtis. It plays on TV occasionally.

If you have any records or photos or stories of Harvey Epley, I would love to have them for the website or our newsletters.

PS: There was a **Private James Epley** also with B Battery. Is that a coincidence or are they related?

Bob Barrett



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Just completed the Winter issue of the Thunderbolt and each publication is better than the previous. Having done the Thunderbolt for 4 years I know how time consuming and demanding the job is. The present publication with pictures is much more interesting and appealing. Claire and her staff are to be commended.

One comment—The front cover doesn't mention the infantry. The 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team is made up of the following: (See Paratroopers' Odyssey)

517th Parachute Infantry Regiment
460th Parachute Artillery Battalion
596th Parachute Engineer Company

May everyone have a very Happy Easter.

Merle

Merger of the 517th PRCT Association and Auxiliary

It is with great relief that I receive the final results on the vote for the merger of the 517 and its Auxiliary. As everyone knows, we had already approved this concept but had inadvertently put a limiting qualification on it: that contributions would continue to be tax-deductible. That provision proved all but impossible, and thanks to the team of **Howard Hensleigh** and **Joanne Barrett**, and their continuing hard work, we have held the necessary vote and can move forward. Thank you also to Bob Barrett for hosting our first mail/internet election!

Just as many if not most of our fellow WWII organizations have closed their doors, the 517 remains viable and active and will be moving forward.

K. Allan Johnson

President, 517th PRCT Association

Army Life, as told by PFC William B. Houston

I just received a copy of William Houston's 84-page journal "Army Life". **Bill Houston** was a member of C Battery of the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and he wrote these recollections in 1992.

Shirley Catterson's son's father-in-law is a WW2 history buff, and ran across this journal at a medals show that he attended.

It may take me a while to scan in the whole document, but here is the Introduction and first two Chapters, on the following pages. More to come. -- BB

ARMY LIFE

AS TOLD BY

P.F.C. WILLIAM B. HOUSTON

A MEMBER OF THE

460TH PARACHUTE FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

IN THE

517TH PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM

1943-1945

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INTRODUCTION

Time had slipped by since my discharge from the army so, in May of 1992, nearly fifty years later, I decided to sit down and recount as much of that experience as I could remember. I can thank my mother and father for saving almost every letter that I wrote home because now I can refer to those letters for good, solid facts and also to jar my memory for incidents of which I have since forgotten.

Of course it was not by choice that I became a soldier, but rather by invitation from our government. Like all other people my age, I can recall the events of December 7, 1941 vividly, and I can remember of going to bed that night very concerned about going into the service. In my mind there was the thought that I would be called almost immediately. I had just graduated from West High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota in June of that year and was working at the Nicollet Hotel, also in Minneapolis, as a porter to earn enough money to start college. In October of 1942 I entered the College of Education at the University of Minnesota and was able to finish my first quarter before the draft board started to breath down my neck.

One of my first attempts to beat the draft board was to try to sign up for the Navy Reserve Officers Training program. The physical was my downfall, they discovered that I was color blind, therefore disqualified me. It was a disappointment but I was happy to get out of jumping from the three meter diving board.

I had doubts as to whether I would be able to complete my second quarter or not so I checked with the local draft board. They would not give any guarantee that I would be able to do so but they did say that anyone who was half way through the quarter would be allowed to finish that quarter. Just before starting my third quarter I again checked with the draft board and the news was anything but encouraging. I was informed that my number was soon to come up so I signed up on the spot, thereby becoming a volunteer. This made no difference once you were inducted, but it was a nice thought at the time. Soon a notice came to report for duty on April 10th, 1943 at the Federal Building in downtown Minneapolis. Report I did and, with a group of other civilians, I was sworn into the army. We were loaded into busses and transported to Fort Snelling which was our induction center. We spent most of our Fort Snelling days in terror of the non-coms, especially the temporary ones with the band around their arm and a stripe or two on the band. On the first day we spent the greater part of our time listening to lectures on the special orders of the army with heavy emphasis and warnings about going A.W.O.L. (absent without leave). We were reminded that since we had already been sworn in there would be a heavy price to pay if we should "go over the hill", or even return late. After all of these threats we were piled on us we were released but ordered to return for duty in one week.

On the 17th of April I did report to the Fort Snelling Induction Center as ordered. As a new recruit the low-ranking non-commissioned officers and even privates seemed to prey on our fears. By this time I was resigned to my fate - that of a soldier! After all, most of the men my age were either in, or were about to go into the service. Regardless of the reason, any male not in uniform, was looked upon as a 4-F, a person physically unfit for service. I consider myself lucky to have lived in Minneapolis, which was the location of Fort Snelling, because I was able to take a streetcar home after duty hours during that week at the center. This is not to say that I could leave every evening, many of the evenings were spent working in the mess hall as a K.P.

There were two things I learned from my army career. One was how to "police" the

area. This consisted of forming a line and walking through an area picking up any trash, especially cigarette butts and candy and gum wrappers. Odd how almost everyone, with the exception of myself, smoked and threw their butts on the ground where I would later be assigned to police. I might note that smoking was much more fashionable in 1943 than it is today and the person in the service who did not smoke was the exception. Another activity in this category was street-sweeping - I can still remember the beautiful job I did on the street which encircled the Round Tower. Unfortunately the street is no longer there, due to the restoration of the old fort, or did I simply sweep the street away? There was a third thing I learned, that was K.P., kitchen police. That meant that about 0445 a non-com would wake you up and tell you to report to the mess hall where you would wash dishes, scrub floors, serve on the serving line, peel potatoes, scrub pans and kettles and wash tables until 2000 or 2100 hours. There was no rhyme or reason to the selection process and you never knew the night before if you would, or would not, be called. It might have been a case of each non-com being responsible for a given number of K.P.s for that day so he simply went through his barracks and selected the appropriate number. Never did they ask, or care, if you had been on the preceding day.

The Twin City Lines, operators of the streetcars in Minneapolis and St. Paul at that time had streetcar lines from both cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, which ended at Fort Snelling, if my memory serves me correctly. To go home after duty hours I boarded the "Dummy Line" which was a very short section of line within the fort, then, from the "Dummy Line" I would transfer to the regular Twin City Lines streetcar which ran to the Minneapolis loop via of Washington Avenue. At the Washington Avenue and Hennepin Avenue intersection I would get off, walk three blocks along Hennepin to Fifth Street where I could board the Bryn Mawr streetcar. From there I rode out west from the loop on Laurel Avenue for about a mile and a half to the front door of our house at 1901 Laurel. This was about a ten mile trip and cost 7 1/2 cents, if you bought tokens, and the transfer was free. The return trip was a reverse ride but it was necessary to be at Hennepin and Washington Avenues to catch the midnight streetcar to the Reception Center, otherwise you would be late and considered A.W.O.L. There was always a large group of new recruits and regular servicemen waiting for the Fort Snelling car, soldiers who had been home or seeing the sights of downtown Minneapolis, so I was never alone.

After shots, a clothing issue, medical examination and some very basic training in military courtesy the time to be shipped out came. A few days before our departure and officer or non-com (I don't recall which, I still feared both) asked if there was anyone in the group who would like to join the paratroops - it sounded good to me so I signed up. Joining was easy, I simply signed a slip of paper that read, "I do hereby volunteer to jump from a plane, while in flight, and land on the ground via parachute". Only a few of us signed. At the time I thought that the paratroops would make a jump and, after a day or two, the regular troops would relieve them and the paratroopers would pull back to a rest area. Such was not the way the real army operated! This I found out later.

I had forgotten to mention the paratroops to my mother or dad but the secret leaked when they came out to Snelling to see me off on the train and saw the tag on my duffel bag which read, "Paratroops, Camp Toccoa, Georgia". It was not a pretty sight when Mom read the tag. At that point I had already begun to wonder whether or not I had made a wise decision. It didn't seem to bother Dad much and that made me feel a little more at ease. The eleven raw recruits that had chosen the paratroops boarded the train and started their trip to Georgia on April 29th, 1943. We did stop at Chicago to change trains and I had an opportunity to telephone my cousin, Mary Reilly. She came down to the station to meet me

but I had to leave before she arrived. We passed through Cincinnati in the evening of April 30th, and arrived at Camp Toccoa, Georgia on the first of May 1943.

CAMP TOCCOA, GEORGIA

Camp Toccoa was located in the extreme northeast corner of Georgia, several days by train from Chicago at that time. Not much can be said for that camp except that it was located in a very remote part of Georgia and that the ground was a red clay which I had never seen before. No sooner had we detrained than we were introduced to push-ups, and from that moment on until my discharge, I heard, "Give me twenty-five" or "Give me fifty", time and time again. I also discovered that paratroopers were not allowed to walk but had to double-time every where they went, even to mess and church. To make things worse the ground had been freshly plowed which made running much more difficult.

It was at Camp Toccoa that I almost washed out of the paratroops. There was a mountain within the camp area known as Mount Currahee which we were required to run up and down each day as a test of your endurance. While on these runs we were not allowed to look either to the left or right so we did not see or enjoy the scenery. You did not fall out of the run, unless you were unconscious, if you wanted to stay in the paratroops. To drop out meant that you did not have "it" therefore the paratroops did not want you. If you fell into an unconscious state you were not transferred to another outfit but, on the other hand, you were left lying where you fell and had to make your way back to the barracks. If a man was shipped out that was the end - his mattress was rolled up and placed on the foot of his bed then his belongings were gathered up and moved out. If anyone asked what had happened to Jones or Smith the only answer he received in reply was, "Who?", followed by the statement, "Never heard of him". My close call came during a run up Mount Currahee when a sergeant questioned whether or not my coordination was good enough for the paratroops so he kept several of us after the rest had been dismissed and had us do some additional running around the area. After a period of time the sergeant gave some of us the O.K. - fortunately I passed and was accepted, at least for the time being. The others were disqualified and shipped out to other outfits.

Two events took place in this camp, one good and the other not so good. The not so good one was the haircut. After forming a line we filed into the "barber" and he did his work. It must have taken him less than two minutes to do his job and each of us left the barber shop minus our hair. The other event took place on 1, May 1943 - it was my first payday in the service. In dollars and cents it was nothing to write home about since I only received \$5.00 minus thirty cents for the unwanted haircut. It took careful planning to stretch the remaining \$4.70 until the next payday and buy the necessities of life. The major expense was ice cream, really ice milk, at twenty cents per pint. The main problem was that the P.X. did not get enough to go around every day and there were days on which I did not have time to go to the P.X., so I was out of luck and forced to go without a treat.

While at Camp Toccoa I was ordered to report to an officer in a tent. The officer asked my name and started with some friendly conversation. "How did the Gopher football team do last season?" and "What were you doing before joining the army?". Then he suddenly asked, "What is a transit?". I answered, "An instrument used in survey work, Sir." "Artillery", snapped the officer and with that the conversation ended and I became an artilleryman.

While in this camp I was introduced to the mock-up tower. This was a 32 foot high tower with a simulated door of a C-47 plane at the top. We donned a parachute harness, less the parachute, and climbed up a ladder on the back side of the tower. At the top we stood in the "door" and, on command, jumped. The harness, which had been snapped to a pulley on a wire running parallel to the door of the mock-up, broke our fall and we coasted from right to

left down the wire. At the end of the ride we tumbled as if to simulate an actual landing. The landing area was a pile of sawdust which appeared to be a mile below when we stood in the jump position in the door, but jumping, even from the mock-up tower, was great sport. One thing you did not do was spit into the sawdust. Those who did were required to pick it up and hold it in their hand while they ran around the area several times yelling, and yelling loud, "I will not spit on the ground".

I also learned how to play "Jab". This was a game which was supposed to improve your response and train you to grab for your emergency chute rip cord automatically. At any time, even in the middle of the sentence, the person in charge would shout, "Jab" and everyone was to grab for the imaginary handle on his chest, where the rip cord handle would be located. Of course the response was never fast enough so usually the entire group had to do push-ups.

If you were caught with an unbuttoned pocket you were ordered to fill the pocket with sand and sew the top closed until you were given permission to empty it. Some of the guys had a pretty full pocket and carried around several pounds of sand for a number of days.

Our day started at 0600 hours, roll call was at 0615, breakfast at 0630 and by 0800 our training had shifted into full gear. Each hour was divided into fifty minutes of work then a ten minute break. So it went, work, break, work, break etc. A typical day may consist of drill, break, P.T. (physical training), break, drill and so on until noon and chow time. In the afternoon it may be drill, an army orientation movie, a four mile run, all with the ten minute break, until 1700 hours when we stood inspection and retreat followed by chow. For the rest of the day we could do as we pleased - such as shine shoes or wash clothes. At 2130 it was lights out.

The men in the outfit were young and may have been the youngest average age of any outfit in the army. The ages were definitely lower than that of the ordinary army personnel. Our "top-kick" at Toccoa was twenty, our lieutenant-colonel was thirty-one and I estimate our captain to be twenty-five.

The army, as well as other branches of the services, did offer one good thing - free mailing privileges. This saved us three cents each and every time we mailed a letter. To mail a letter, all that was required was that you wrote "Free" in place of a stamp on the envelope and have a complete return address with your name, rank serial number and unit designation. These letters went as regular first class mail. In those days there was also an air-mail class, a faster but more expensive way of moving letters through the postal system. Air-mail letters could not be sent free but had to have the regular six cent air-mail stamp on them.

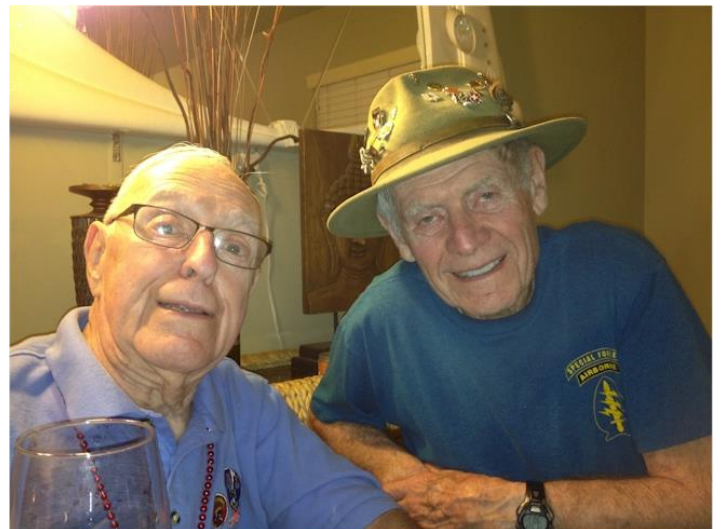
I learned what happens when you turn the wrong direction during drill. At Toccoa I once did and had to run around the block twice while yelling, "I will turn in the direction I am told".

In the army a helmet liner was worn under the steel helmet. The liner was a plastic helmet in which there was a band designed to make the liner a universal size, a "one size fits all" unit which was worn under the steel helmet. All steel helmets were the same size and could be interchanged with any liner. This was not so with the German helmets, they came in different sizes and were worn without any liner. Early in our training, such as at Toccoa, we were required to wear a helmet liner but even this light plastic unit was a nuisance. It did make a decent sun hat though but, in spite of all that, I managed to get a good sunburn on my soldiers. The sunburn only served to balance off the pain of the blisters on my feet.



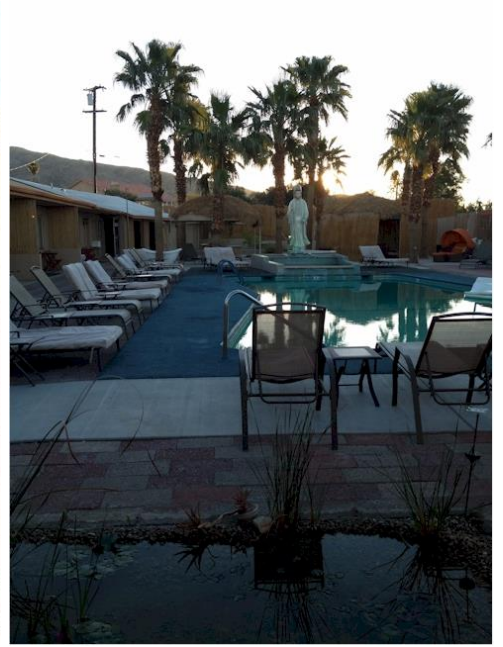
517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Palm Springs Reunion





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team





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, or just click on the unsubscribe link on the email.
- 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:

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c/o Joanne Barrett
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Cohasset, MA 02025