



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2215

May 25, 2014

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

Website
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Memorial Day – May 26, 2014



Memorial Day is a US federal holiday wherein the men and women who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces are remembered.^[1] The holiday, which is celebrated every year on the final Monday of May,^[2] was formerly known as **Decoration Day** and originated after the American Civil War to commemorate the Union and Confederate soldiers who died in the Civil War. By the 20th century, Memorial Day had been extended to honor all Americans who have died while in the military service.^[3] It typically marks the start of the summer vacation season, while Labor Day marks its end.

Many people visit cemeteries and memorials, particularly to honor those who have died in military service. Many volunteers place an American flag on each grave in national cemeteries.

Annual Decoration Days for particular cemeteries are held on a Sunday in late spring or early summer in some rural areas of the American South, notably in the mountains. In cases involving a family graveyard where remote ancestors as well as those who were deceased more recently are buried, this may take on the character of an extended family reunion to which some people travel hundreds of miles. People gather on the designated day and put flowers on graves and renew contacts with kinfolk and others. There often is a religious

service and a "dinner on the ground," the traditional term for a potluck meal in which people used to spread the dishes out on sheets or tablecloths on the grass. It is believed that this practice began before the American Civil War and thus may reflect the real origin of the "memorial day" idea.

Memorial Day is not to be confused with Veterans Day; Memorial Day is a day of remembering the men and women who died while serving, while Veterans Day celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans.

From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_Day

[517 Honor Roll](#) – the List of 254 members of the 517th PRCT who were killed in action



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This is so moving.
Please pass it on. Remember our Veterans.

Betty Traver

This is a very beautiful tribute to our military men and women. A must see!!!
One of the best tributes to America's veterans and families...



Turn up your sound and click on [Mansions](#)

I dont know if this will be of interest to our group, but it is nice to see other countries in Europe who remember the sacrifices that our World War II soldiers made to free their countries. This story about the Czeck Republic is a very moving story and looks very similar of what we see from our close friends in France.

Lory Curtis



This is an amazing story of remembrance. In the Czech Republic , the school children of the equivalent of fifth grade are each assigned one of the American and Canadian liberators buried there. Their grave is the student's responsibility for the year and they learn all there is to know of their own hero. Their surviving family is sent letters and they respond to the annual child who tends their loved one's grave. No apology needed here!
Have you ever wondered if anyone in Europe remembers America 's sacrifice in World War II? There is an answer in a small town in the Czech Republic . The town called Pilsen (Plzen).

Every 5 years, Pilsen conducts the Liberation Celebration of the City of Pilsen in the Czech Republic . May 6th, 2010, marked the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Pilsen by General George Patton's 3rd Army. Pilsen is

the town that every American should visit.
Because they love America and the American Soldier.

Even 65 years later... by the thousands,

The citizens of Pilsen came to say thank you. Lining the streets of Pilsen for miles From the large crowds, to quiet reflective moments, including this American family's private time to honor and remember their American hero.





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This is the crash site of Lt. Virgil P. Kirkham, the last recorded American USAAF pilot killed in Europe during WWII. It was Lt. Kirkham's 82nd mission and one that he volunteered to go on. At the time, this 20-year-old pilot's P-47 Thunderbolt plane was shot down, a young 14-year-old Czech girl, Zdenka Sladkova, was so moved by his sacrifice she made a vow to care for him and his memory. For 65 straight years, Zdenka, now 79-years-old, took on the responsibility to care for Virgil's crash site and memorial near her home. On May 4th, she was recognized by the Mayor of Zdenka's home town of Trhanova , Czech Republic , for her sacrifice and extraordinary effort to honor this American hero.

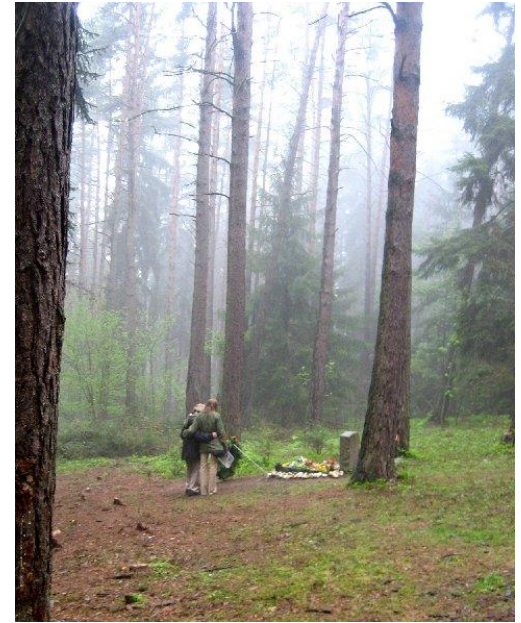
Another chapter in this important story... the Czech people are teaching their children about America 's sacrifice for their freedom. American Soldiers, young and old, are the Rock Stars these children and their parents want autographs from. Yes, Rock Stars!

As they patiently waited for his autograph, the respect this little Czech boy and his father have for our troops serving today was heartwarming and inspirational. The Brian LaViolette Foundation established The Scholarship of Honor in tribute to General George S. Patton and the American Soldier, past and present. Each year, a different military hero will be honored in tribute to General Patton's memory and their mission to liberate Europe . This award will be presented to a graduating senior who will be entering the military or a form of community service such as fireman, policeman, teaching or nursing -- a cause greater than self. The student will be from 1 of the 5 high schools in Pilsen ,



Czech Republic .

The first award will be presented in May 2011 in honor of Lt. Virgil Kirkham, that young 20-year-old P-47 pilot killed 65 years ago in the final days of WWII. Presenting Virgil's award will be someone who knows the true meaning of service and sacrifice... someone who looks a lot like Virgil. Marion Kirkham, Virgil's brother, who himself served during WWII in the United States Army Air Corps!!! In closing... Here is what the city of Pilsen thinks of General Patton's grandson. George Patton Waters (another Rock Star!) we're proud to say, serves on Brian's Foundation board. And it's front page news over there not buried in the middle of the social section



For more pictures, see:

<http://www.mophdepartmentpa.org/Memorial%20Day%20in%20the%20town%20of%20Plzen%20Czech%20Republic.pdf>



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Happy Memorial Day **John Pastalenic**,

I am honored and grateful for your service and memories of the 517th recalled and shared by you and all the other great men of the 517th.

My dad **Richard Mitacek** H Company 3rd Bat was with you at the Crater. He passed September 1976.

All my hope and love to you and yours,

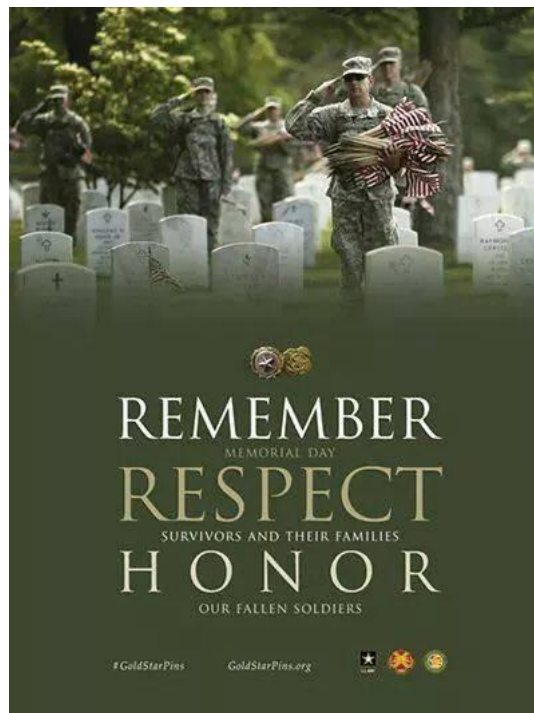
Clare Mitacek Erber

Wishing the 517th PRCT, their families and the Association a peaceful Memorial Day.

- All the Best,
Paul Abbene

And to you Bob and the Barrett Family a peaceful Memorial Day. Thanks for all your efforts. Cheers, Paul

Happy Birthday **Leo Dean** and Congratulations Leo and **Mimsey Boyle** on their jump. I wish I could have been there to join in on the fun.





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Other MailCall News

Hello to all the guys in "C" Co. 517th. Would enjoy seeing a message **from Nolan Powell, Deacon Jones, Paul Vukovich** & anybody else who remembers me. Bonnie and I will soon be driving up to Oregon for my Bolin family reunion where I was raised in The Dalles. Will visit a daughter and son-in-law in Portland and go to the ocean at Newport for a week vacation while up there. A daughter in Northern California will accompany us and help with the driving.

We are drying up in California after 7 straight years of drought, this year has been the worst. The reservoirs are just about empty and our household water is rationed severely. There are indications that the El Nino' is warming up and may bring some of the tropical storms up this way next winter, so we are hopeful. If that doesn't happen it is going to get ugly.

Bill Bolin

Here are a couple members of C Company, being interviewed for "A Cut Above" in 2010.

See: <http://vimeo.com/10635180>

**William MacRae, Nolan Powell,
Brian Welborn, and Les Perkins**
of C Company



The book Dragoon-Autopsy of a Battle by **Jean-Loup Gassend** arrived today. It is a 560 page book with an amazing amount of detail, pictures, and Southern France WW II History.

Merle



Happy 90th Birthday, **K. Allan Johnson!**





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Hello to All,

I'm sending an invitation for the ceremony that will be held at the American Monument of Rencheux on Friday, the 30th of May at 04.00 p.m.

We've received the confirmation that Ernie LAMSON, veteran of the Company A, 508th PIR and Dick O'DONNELL, webmaster of the Family & Friends 508th PIR Website, will be with us.

Very Truly Yours,

On behalf of the C-47 Ardennes Salm River Chapter (Belgium)

Eddy Lamberty
(President)

--

Eddy Lamberty
Avenue Joseph Lejeune 45
B-4980 Trois-Ponts

For more info and directions, see:

www.517prct.org/mailcall/2215/Lettre_invitation_ceremonie_30_mai_2014_English.pdf

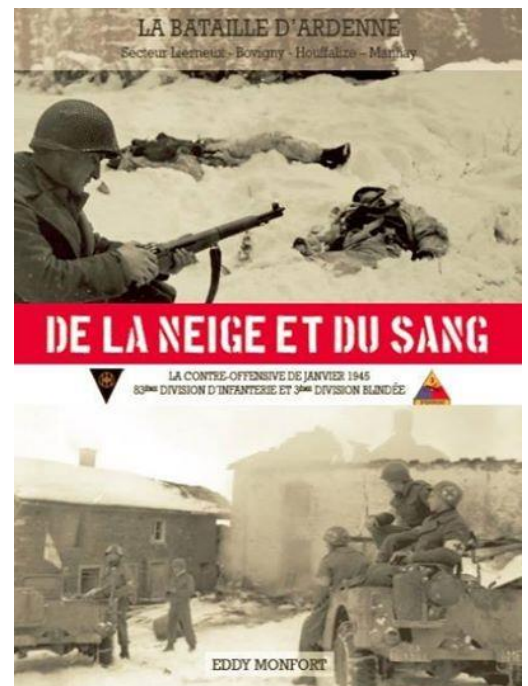
Eddy Monfort just published his new book. Here are some notes from his FaceBook announcement:

"The baby was born! After several years of research, I have the immense pleasure to announce the publication of a new book on the battle of the bulge. A/4 format-284 pages, over 250 photos mostly unpublished, nearly 80 witnesses, military and civilian, recount us their memories and cards 20 illustrates this work. It describes the events of the American counteroffensive of January 1945 (83rd Inf.Div. and 3rd. Arm.div) in Manhay sector - Lierneux - Vielsalm - Boyd - Houffalize. "For more info, contact me on: e.monfort@belgacom.net - thanks to broadcast!"

"**Snow and Blood**" is the title of the new book by our friend and author Eddy Monfort.

Very many books have been written about the offensive of the Ardennes, but few people who reveal the events of the American counteroffensive of January 1945.

In this book, Eddy traces the counter-attack led by the 83rd infantry division and 3rd armoured division from 3 to 22 January 1945. These are two units among many others who participated in this great battle in the forests and countryside of the Ardennes and especially the Minnow fighting through the area east of Manhay road - Houffalize. Of Manhay to Lierneux - Langlire - Chapman - Boyd -... Nearly 80 witnesses, civilian and military recount us their memories and more than 250 photos and very many maps enrich the writings of this collection. This book in format A/4 of 284 pages already available at the price of €30 from the author: => Eddy Monfort Street, Gill, Madison, 15-6960 Manhay e.monfort@belgacom.net 0491/074925 after 19.00 hrs (Translated by Bing)





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Hi Bob,

After reading about the publication of **Jean-Loup Gassend's** "[Operation Dragoon](#)," I purchased the book from Amazon. It arrived last Friday. I've begun reading it. What an amazing book! It is truly fascinating! And imagine my surprise and thrill when on page 67 I found a picture of my Dad, **Edward Smith**! He's the middle man of five paratroopers standing in front of their Dakota aircraft, "Blanche," before their flight to Southern France. The picture is from the collection of **Mike Kane**.

I have a question from that same page, and perhaps you can answer it for me: My Dad was attached to the 517 PRCT. However, I know that he was in North Africa, Sicily, and throughout Italy before participating in The Champagne Campaign. Also, I may be mistaken, but I think I recall him saying he did a total of five combat jumps. Reading on page 67 about the 509th PIB, I'm wondering if my Dad was attached to it before joining up with the 517th. Would you have access to that information, Bob? Thanks so much for your help!

Everyone, buy "[Operation Dragoon](#)". You won't be disappointed! Great job, Jean-Loup!

All the best,
Shirley Catterson

BB: Yes, we know **Mike Kane** had a lot of photos of D Company. I have not seen the one in Jean-Loup's book (yet), but here are a couple more of **Ed Smith** from:

http://www.517prct.org/photos/d_company_files/kane_company_d.htm





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Bob I would like to call **John Pastalenic** as I know he does not do email. He is standing right behind my father **Mike Sura** in that Italian Photo from **Ceil Doty**. Is there a phone number you can share with me or another means of contacting him.

Dennis Sura



Sgt. Robert P. Price and 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, H Company

Top row: Dick Huggler, John Pastalenic, Wally Vincent, unknown, unknown, last with helmet: Sowicki (sp.?)

Middle, bending over with hand on shoulder: Mike Sura

2nd row, unknown, unknown, Manfred Seeburger, unknown, kneeling with cigarette: George R. Monkhouse

Bottom row, Sgt. Robert P. Price; next to him: SSgt. James S. Wilson

Hello Anne,
we saw your question on last mail call....
we live just above Menton at the Italian border line in a small town called Sospel.

you are welcome to visit our area where the 517th PRCT where in 1944. Our village was liberated for the 28th october 1944. This year will be a commemoration on 25 and 26th october.

Regards

Patou and Roland
Sospel, France

Submitted by

Name: **christopher lincoln**
From: hanford , ca 93230
E-mail:
clincoln92@yahoo.commy

Comments:

my father **Raymond E. Lincoln** was in A Co. 517th and passed away in April of 2001. Always proud and never backed away from a fight for what was right. One time 3 of his buddies came to vist at once. What a time we had. Fishing. eating and drinking. So fortunate for me to spend time with these guys!

Added: May 24, 2014



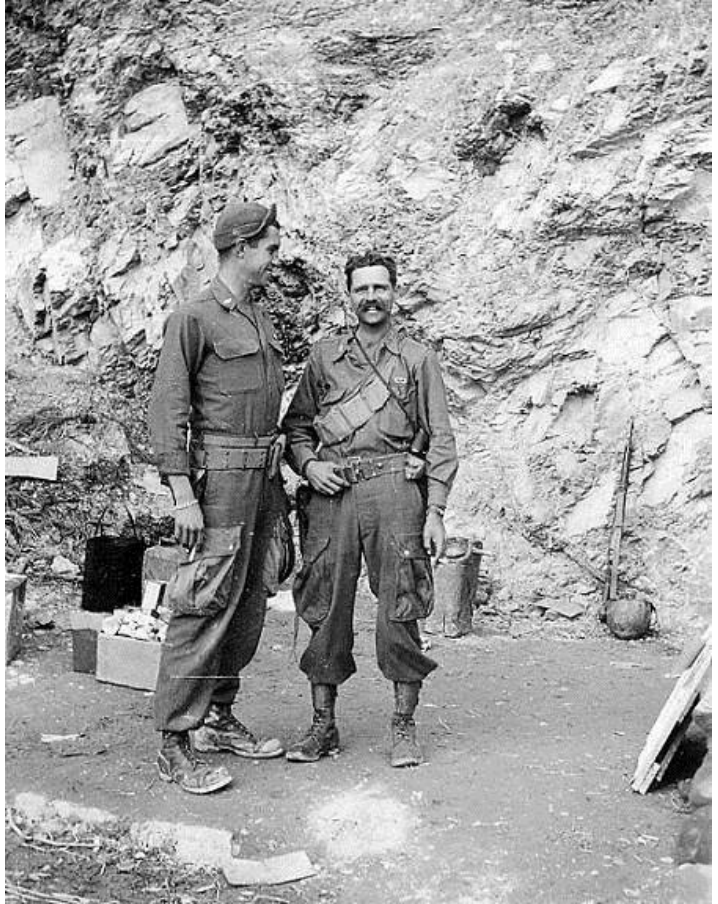
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517 Recollections

"I was leading the way down the road towards the Chateau Sainte Roseline with a flanker downhill to my left and another uphill to my right. Chopper was about twenty yards behind me and the others strung out along the road behind him. I was watching my flankers when Chopper yelled and then fired a couple of shots. I had walked right by a German in a slit trench. He would have killed me but Chopper got him first. Kienlen jumped down in the ditch and came up with an Iron Cross and a small pistol in about ten seconds. He smiled and waved me on.

- **Major Donald W. Fraser** recollection, A/517 CO and then 1/517 XO.

"Chopper" Kienlen & Major Fraser in the Col de Braus



I was going through some old e-mails and came across an e-mail that was sent to me by Mickey Moses, the son of **Jim Moses** from the 596, that included a speech that was delivered 50 years ago at the 1964 reunion in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Please add this to the memories of the 517 on this Memorial Day weekend.

Thanks for all your help in keeping this alive.

- **Steve Markle** -

REMARKS FOR 517TH COMBAT INFANTRY TEAM CONVENTION
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

by LT GEN BOWEN, 15 AUGUST 1964

Lieutenant Sanford, ladies and gentlemen:

For the third time in the history of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, welcome to Fort Bragg.

I imagine some of you remember coming to Fort Bragg for the first time. You were new but full-fledged paratroopers then. Even Camp Mackall must have looked good after months of running up and down Currahee Mountain at Camp Taccoa--and after Fort Benning's pioneer jump school.

But it was worth it, for otherwise you may never have been selected to participate in the Tennessee Maneuvers--or to travel to Europe aboard the Grace liner Santa Rosa with only a few Air Corps crews as competition for those other distinguished passengers--two companies of the Women's Army Corps.

Now, I'm a Johnny-come-lately paratrooper, as some of you know. I came in at the corporate level, so to speak, as a brigadier general and so I'm not qualified to tell first-hand jump stories of World War II, as you are.

But, since becoming a member of the jumping fraternity almost ten years ago, I've made a point of delving into airborne history. I can even come up with some interesting facts about the 517th and its companion outfits, the 460th Parachute Field Artillery and the 596th Airborne Engineer Company.

It hasn't always been easy to trace the accomplishments of the 517th for isn't it true that outfits like the 82d Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne

Division were better manned with public information personnel, and therefore outperformed you in the public print?

But nobody can take from you the glory of your combat jump into Southern France. Stars and Stripes called it "Champagne Campaign"--but you know that a lot of blood flowed, too--some of ours, but mostly and fortunately that of the enemy.

The champagne didn't come until later in those weekends at Nice, where some of you also found charming French wives. Now on that latter subject I AM something of an expert because Mrs. Bowen is French also--and charming besides.

Even before your jump into Southern France, you fought with distinction in Tuscany with the 36th Division.

And, after Southern France, you became the most attached outfit in Europe, fighting as a fire brigade for the glory of the Third Armored Division, the 7th Armored Division, the 30th, 75th, 78th and 106th Infantry Divisions, and the 82d Airborne Division.

Then came your service with the lucky or unlucky 13th Airborne Division, depending on the way you look at all those missions which were aborted--like the jump across the Rhine which you never had to make--the jump south of Stuttgart, also called off--and that jump into Denmark, which VE Day made unnecessary.

It it hadn't been for the atom bomb, you might have got to jump in the Pacific. Instead, you returned to Fort Bragg--to march in that great parade in New York City--wearing 82d Airborne Division patches.

If that weren't bad enough, when they gave your personnel to the 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment, at the deactivation of the 13th Airborne Division, there were more of you there than there were 505ers.

So I guess you have a right to be known as the usually attached, frequently aborted, unhonored and unsung fire brigade of the European Theater of Operations.

But you've managed to produce a trio of general officers--Major General Louis A. Walsh, whom I wish could be here today--Brigadier General Dick Seitz--and Colonel Graves' ex-hatchetman, Brigadier General Zais.

And, of course, you produced a governor too. Knowing him well, as I do, I sometimes get the impression that Terry Sanford is as proud of his lieutenancy with the 517th as he is of the governorship of North Carolina. I know for sure that it wouldn't take much urging for him to buckle on a parachute and go with the green light again.

If you don't know North Carolina politics very well, I might pass on some information. The Governor was instrumental in getting you to come to Raleigh for your convention. Well, have as much fun there as you can, you won't embarrass him in the least. North Carolina law provides that the Governor cannot succeed himself--and Lieutenant Terry Sanford won't be on the ballot this November.

And have fun at Fort Bragg too. I am sincerely glad to see so many of you return for temporary attachment to XVIII Airborne Corps. It's a pleasure to note that many of you have brought your families with you.

The 82d Airborne Division has planned a demonstration I know you will enjoy. It won't be the same as the Old Airborne Army but remember--you of the 517th Parachute Combat Team, the 460th Parachute Field Artillery and the 596th Airborne Engineer Company are part of the great airborne tradition which we do our best to keep alive. If paratrooping seems a little easier these days, mark it up to progress.

Thank you for your interest in coming to Fort Bragg.



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Sgt. Cecil Herbert Doty, H Company

After Dennis Sura's note (page 7), I realized that we haven't heard from **Cecil Doty** in some time, and his MailCall email account has been bouncing. Cecil was a regular contributor to MailCall and the reunions back in 2000-2004. Sadly I found an obituary for Cecil from 2011:

Cecil H. Doty

Birth: Sep. 22, 1917, New Mexico, USA

Death: Jan. 2, 2011, Newton, Harvey County, Kansas, USA



NEWTON — Cecil H. Doty, 93, passed away on Sunday (Jan. 2, 2011) at Newton Medical Center in Newton. He was born on Sept. 22, 1917, in Fox, N.M., the son of James and Edith Doty. He was a graduate of Newton High School in Newton. He served in the U.S. Army and was a part of the 513th Parachute Infantry. On Dec. 22, 1945, he married Marjorie Arlene Hackenberg in Wichita. She passed away on Jan. 5, 2010. After his military career, he worked for KG&E for more than 30 years as a supervisor. Cecil was an avid card player and enjoyed living at Schowalter Villa in Hesston. Cecil was a member of Grace Baptist Church of Hesston and the American Legion Post 0002 in Newton. He is survived by his sister-in-law, Waneta Showalter of Hutchinson; brother, Melvin of Wichita; and several nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents and several siblings. Funeral services will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Schowalter Villa Chapel, with visitation one hour prior to the service at the chapel. Pastor Mark Smith will officiate. Burial will follow in the Hesston City Cemetery with military rights conducted by Fort Riley Honor Guard. Memorials can be made to the Good Samaritan Caring Fund in care of Miller-Ott Funeral Home, 107 S. Lancaster, P.O. Box 32, Hesston, KS 67062.



*Sgt. Cecil H. Doty (front)
and Mortar Squad and 3rd Platoon H Company*



Cecil Doty was interviewed as part of the team recounting the Manhay attack, recorded at the 517th Annual Reunion in Oklahoma City, 04 June 2003: [Accounts of the 3rd Battalion attack on Manhay](#)



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From MailCall 1850, August 5, 2009:

Newspaper Article about Cecil Doty

Cecil Doty is living history. The 91-year-old World War II veteran is one of the few remaining members of an elite paratrooper unit which fought against 7 to 1 odds and helped defeat Axis forces in The Battle of the Bulge.

This past weekend Doty was able to fly again in the same model plane he jumped from as a youth. The Boogie Baby, a C46 plane held 14 troopers reenacting many of Doty's jumps.

Even 66 years later, the prospect of jumping from a plane 1,200 feet off the ground brought the same rush Doty experienced in his youth. "It gets into your system. I still got the flutters in my stomach that I did when I was jumping," said the veteran.

However, Doty noted a difference between the reenactment and his experiences as a trooper. "They were using 35-foot diameter shoots. When we were jumping behind lines, we had 28-foot shoots. It makes a big difference. We hit the ground going 28 feet per second. It was like jumping out of a 2-story building," said Doty.

He said while watching the jumpers drift toward earth, he wondered how long it would take them to reach the ground.

Doty remembered the thrill of the jump, "You didn't feel like you were falling until that last 100 feet. Then the world really started coming up at you fast."

One other distinct difference was the amount of time it took the younger squadron to empty the plane. "When I was in, we jumped 14 men in 14 seconds. That's how fast we could get out that door," he said.

Doty was a member of the armed forces from 1940 to 1948.

He began his military career as a member of the National Guard.

However, just before his hitch ended December 26, 1941, Pearl Harbor was bombed. Doty remained in the service for seven more years. His final 3 years, Doty spent in the reserves and working for Kansas Power and Electric.

He was enticed to join an elite branch of the armed forces, the paratroopers.

"Paratroopers got \$50 more a month," said Doty of his reasoning behind joining the choice jump squad.

Along with the extra pay, Doty said a lot was expected of the 517 Parashoot Regimental Combat Team. Early morning runs and calisthenics before breakfast shaped Doty's day.

The Battling Buzzard 3rd Platoon was a select group of paratroopers. "When the other guys were in trouble, we were put in to get them moving again," said Doty.

Doty logged 10 jumps during his military career. However, one of his most memorable was his 6th.

During a practice jump in North Carolina, Doty was put in charge of his squadron for the first time. "It was a windy day. The pilot turned the jump-light on too soon. We were jumping way too low. My shoot got caught in a tree," Doty's shoot lodged in a tree parallel to the ground, leaving Doty to fall the remainder of the way. "I broke my leg. It was hard to make that next jump that's for sure," he continued.



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In May of 1944, Doty made his first combat jump. His plane departed from Italy to fly the men behind enemy lines in southern France. The five-hour flight left the runway at midnight.

“We were supposed to be dropped 15 miles behind the lines. The radar went out and our pilot dropped us 50 miles behind the lines. It took us three days to get where we were supposed to be and set up the beach-head and get it together for the sea arrivals,” said Doty.

Later, Doty discovered, that on his jump into southern France, the plane had been much lower than the troops believed. “We were only 500 feet off the ground. Your shoot takes 250 feet to fully open. They wanted us down there in a hurry,” he said.

Doty decided to keep a memento from his jump into France. “I knew they would never recover those shoots, so I cut a panel out and kept it. The funny thing was, after we landed, a little while later there were a lot of French ladies with silk blouses,” he joked.

The Battling Buzzards were involved in five major battles. However, The Battle of the Bulge was the worst combat Doty saw. “Of 118 men in my company, only 18 walked out on their own,” he said. Some soldiers were killed, but many were wounded either in battle or were suffering from frostbitten feet and hands.

In the midst of shelling and gunfire, Doty encountered a single civilian. “There was this old lady who was still in her house. She was yelling this was her home and she wasn’t going anywhere,” he said.

Despite the hellish conditions and vicious fighting of World War II, Doty only lost one man under his command. “He was a new recruit. I didn’t know him that well, but I still think about it quite a lot,” he said.

The hardship of war has not been forgotten by Doty. “You never forget combat,” he said.

During his time in the field, Doty saw all the horrors of war. “A man was hit by a mortar. His leg was blown off. He died before we could get the medic to him. Ten years later, I met his sister at a reunion. I felt I had to tell her I was with him with the priest gave him his last rites,” said Doty. He said the man’s sister was relieved to finally know what happened to her brother and was grateful to Doty for sharing his final minutes with her.

Doty’s final jump was on V.E. day. The Battling Buzzards were assigned to jump and liberate Nazi Concentration Camps. However, the squadron’s rescue missions were canceled because heavy artillery would arrive into the camps before paratroopers were needed.

Doty’s spent 100 days in southern France on what many would consider a plum mission. “The only thing we had to do was hold onto part of the line. The base had 10-foot thick concrete walls. Nothing was going to penetrate that. We’d set there and exchange a few rounds. We’d even take a few days of R and R and still be considered in combat,” said Doty.

Despite the lack of action, the Buzzards were not leaving without a final jump in the European theater. “My commander said, “We’ve been sitting around here, let’s go take a jump.” I thought, this is my last one, and I jumped 13th,” he said.

Every five years, the Battling Buzzards tour their battle route in Europe. Taking a moment, Doty reflected on a trip to Belgium in 1995. “These kids, they would run up to me and they would thank me. Their parents told them what we had done, and how we saved their country and these kids wanted to thank us for it,” he said.



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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

- 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:

517 PRCT Association, Inc.

c/o Joanne Barrett
70 Pleasant Street
Cohasset, MA 02025

Army Life, as told by PFC William B. Houston (Part 5)

Another chapter from **William Houston's** biography is on the following pages.
This chapter covers "**Last Stay at MacKall**" from **March-April 1944**.

Next week: ***We Sail for Europe***

LAST STAY AT MACKALL

My first letter from Mackall to home after maneuvers was written on March 5th, 1944 and contained both good and bad news. The bad; it was raining - the good; there was talk of furloughs going around.

In that letter I wrote that we had had a couple of easy days but expressed my doubts about this condition lasting very long.

The "17th Airborne Division" has been dropped from our address. It is now official that we are a combat team and no longer part of a division.

One of the fellows in our battery read that Betty Hutton, the movie star, was about to marry a fellow who was quite a bit older than she, so he wrote to advise her against such a marriage. To his surprise, about two weeks later he got a beautiful, autographed photograph from her through the mail. Poor Peters walked around in a daze for weeks after receiving the picture.

We had a rather unusual and interesting group of men in our battery. We had the first and only Japanese-American paratrooper (at least at that time), Junie Kawamura who was from Minneapolis. One of our lieutenants claims to be a fourth generation descendant of President Polk. The lieutenant also claims that his father was a lieutenant-general. This officer was Lt. Perry I. Polk, more often known as Perry I. And there was S/Sgt. Bill Westbrook, platoon sergeant from Florida, who insisted in telling the fellows from the north that down in Florida they spend the summers skinnin' 'gators and winters 'skinnin' Yankees, but he was an O.K. guy. Westbrook served with a division, before he became airborne, where some of the men had hooted at some women in shorts who were playing golf with a general. Two things developed from this incident - the entire division had to make a one hundred mile march and it became known as the "You Who" division. Then there was Phil Kennemer who was released from jail on the condition that he join the paratroops. Phil had a little racket of his own - he bought war bonds, had them mailed to him in Italy, sold them to Italian civilians, then put in a claim to the Treasury Department that the bonds had been lost or stolen and the bonds were then replaced. As fate would have it Phil was the first enlisted man to be killed in action,

Bud and I have a new hobby, We borrow blotters with pin-up pictures on them, draw skirts on the girls, then return the blotters. It is getting so a person can hardly borrow a blotter around here anymore.

From the 14th of March until the 28th in 1944 I must have been home on furlough. In a letter I mentioned returning to camp very early Tuesday morning on the 28th but did not mention the month or year in the letter. On my return that morning I discovered that the barracks were nearly empty except for a few bunks. The men had moved while I was on furlough and I didn't know to where. I spent the rest of the night on an empty cot with only a mattress as my bedding. The battalion was out in the field and only a few of us remained around the barracks. Later that morning those of us left in camp were told to get ready to go out into the field and join the others. However, they omitted to tell us where to assemble or at what time so we goofed off until noon. Then we went to chow. This was not the smartest move and the mess-sergeant caught us and ordered us to report to him at 1300. After eating we went to the P.X. and bought a sundae, a bag of marshmallows and six candy bars for the sergeant. Then we reported and presented our gifts. He must not have been impressed because the next thing we knew we were mopping the officers' quarters.

After eating chow our entire plan caved in and we were forced to join the battery in the field.

When we did catch up with the battery it was just in time for the rain so Mac and I put up a tent, climbed in and wrapped ourselves in our blanket. During the night Mac began to talk in his sleep and woke me up. It went something like this, "Where are you going sergeant? Want me to come over there? All right, wait a minute until I get my cap". The first thing I knew his hand was all over my hair, shoulders and in my eyes; it was then that I started to laugh and woke him up. Mac then told me that he had been dreaming that he was going home on a furlough and sitting across from him on the train was a W.A.C. sergeant. In his dream he was looking for his hat so he could move across the aisle and sit with her. I did not know it until later but Mac had trouble with dreams.

Bud finally made it back from his furlough. I was pretty lucky, they have cut the furlough time for those who live in Minnesota from fourteen to eight days. I'm glad I got mine in before the cut.

One game we played while home on furlough was to see how many officers we could pass without saluting. On a few occasions I was challenged but nothing ever came of it.

I was on K.P. in the officers' mess again on March 30th and not only tried my hand at cooking but got my fill of bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches. As far as cooking goes I made some toast and tried some pancakes. The pancakes were so big that by time I had succeeded in turning the first ones over, by sections, the last ones were burned. This ruined my cooking career. The fact remains that there is very little difference between a cook and a K.P. except that the K.P. works.

One of my most notable feats is the special way I prepare the biscuits from K-rations. First you take the biscuits, K-1 and K-2 biscuits out of the package, fill the water-proof carton with water, put the biscuits back into the carton, boil the combination for nine minutes and 4.7 seconds, drain the water and eat the carton. It still tastes like cardboard but is much better than the biscuits.

The colonel who commanded the 517th has been relieved of his command. It is said that Col. Walsh was the youngest regimental commander in the United States Army and all of the 517th men and officers will miss him.

On April the third I sent a postcard home which remarked about the beautiful weather we were having at that time. The interesting thing about the postcard was that at the top this message was printed: "These postcards are FREE to Service Men and Women in uniform. Furnished by the Kiwanis Club of Minneapolis, Minnesota the city of Lakes and Parks".

On the sixth of April the governor of Connecticut, some other governors and a few ex-governors came to our camp to watch a parade ground jump. For some reason I did not jump with that group.

We saw a P.W. camp with German prisoners. They do not have too bad of a life, it looks like they play volleyball all day.

We had a good demonstration of thermite, which is used in grenades and incinerating bombs earlier in the week. To demonstrate the heat a thermite grenade generates they used a G. I. helmet. It burned a hole through the helmet in about five seconds, then they piled about six inches of sand on the helmet, coal was added on top of the sand and in about a minute the coals were glowing red. To top it off, lime was added, and the sand turned into glass.

I had guard duty on the second and third of April and after I got off duty Bud and I went on pass. We went to Rockingham where they had a carnival which turned out to be expensive evening and there was a sideshow dancer that was so suggestive that I did not

bother to watch her. Bud had his problems with a game that he, or anybody else, could not win but he kept trying. He was shaking a board with holes in it; each hole had a number assigned to it, which meant that several holes had the same number, and the object was to have the numbers total a given amount. Each time he would shake he would fall short of the total by just a small amount and the barker would show him how, if just one marble had fallen into a hole of higher value he would have won, but the barker never did subtract the value of the hole from which he had taken the marble. Actually Bud was shaking six marbles but the barker was totaling seven. He didn't stand a ghost of a chance.

It was on April the fifth that we went on a cooking problem - what a mess! It took three of us two hours and twenty-five minutes to cook three pork chops, three onions, three potatoes and to warm half of a can of beans. We had to cook the food in our mess-kits and the mess-kits got so hot that the plating on the kit blistered. For dinner we ate tomatoes and cold wieners. We got to bed at 0100 and they said we could sleep until 1100. Not so. At 0700 we had to get up and police the area and at 0730 we were assigned details. Almost everyone had a detail and nobody had a chance to sleep.

I could not overcome the temptation that came to me on the sixth of March so I bought an Eversharp pencil at the P.X. It is blue with 14K gold, works the same as the other one, but is a little larger. It had a \$5.00 price on it but my cost was only \$2.50.

I must throw in this story because it concerns Camp Mackall but the exact time is not important, even though the incident lasted for forty years. In the army it was a mark of prestige to be the first to know and divulge information so I played the game but pushed it a little further. By simple observation I would draw a conclusion and come up with some fairly accurate predictions. As an example, we only had chicken on Sunday so if I saw chickens being unloaded at the mess-hall on Tuesday I would wait until Thursday or Friday, then announce that I would like to have a chicken dinner next Sunday. Sure enough, we would have chicken. After a few successful guesses I had gained the confidence of some of the fellows and they started asking where I got the information. My answer was, "My uncle told me". By this I meant Uncle Sam, the symbol for the United States. However, it was interpreted to mean Col. Gumby, a colonel in our battalion. At one of the Saturday morning inspections Lt. Roberts asked, "Houston, what relation are you to the colonel?". I had to answer "None, Sir". That should have ended the farce but for some reason S/Sgt. Bucher never did get the word. At a reunion in 1984, forty years later, Bucher admitted that he had "treated me with kid gloves" because he thought that I was the colonel's nephew. To this day the incident is mentioned every time we get together.

On Easter Sunday I wrote home and complained about the lack of Easter spirit at Camp Mackall. There were no new and colorful clothes around and only a few lilies. We had turkey instead of ham for dinner but I missed out on most of the dinner because of an accident. While I was entering the mess-hall, that tells you how close I came to having turkey, I stabbed my thumb on the spring on the screen door and a medic took me to the dispensary. The medic did not wait until I had been treated, but went back to the mess-hall and joined the others for dinner, while I waited to be treated. By the time the wound had been attended to and I returned to the mess-hall there was very little left, so I was just S.O.L.

Bud had returned from his furlough on Good Friday and on Easter Sunday afternoon we went to a movie. We went but did not see the movie because the sound track failed to work so the movie was called off. Instead we ended up at the service club where a cat named Trouble had some new kittens. They were as cute as could be and each had a ribbon tied around its neck. Trouble spent all of her time carrying the kittens to new hiding places but the guys kept bringing them back to pet them. Trouble couldn't win.

I had written home to tell the folks that we could take our watches overseas but that I had planned to send mine home. Also, we could take cameras but could not use them on the ship.

We were out in the field on the tenth and eleventh of April and when we came in we went to a movie. We saw "You can't Ration Love", not exactly a four star picture but a cute one. It was about some college girls who dealt with the manpower shortage by issuing ration cards to three guys. At least it took our minds off of the war.

One incident that happened at Camp Mackall, during one of our three tours there, stands out in my mind because it was so typical of the army. I was on detail as the battery runner - this meant that I was to stay in the vicinity of the battery commander's office and deliver, or pick up, messages to or from anyplace within the camp. On that particular day our regular first-sergeant was not available for duty so another sergeant was working in his place. It was the duty of this sergeant to fill out and send the "Daily Report" to battalion headquarters each morning. The sergeant did so and told me to run, and he meant run because we always had to double-time wherever we went, the report to headquarters. I did so. At headquarters I waited for the response but got a response I did not expect. The officer looked at the report and yelled, "Moral good?". He then continued in a loud voice, "The moral is excellent, go back and have it changed". This I did, then I had to return headquarters and still make a fourth trip back to the battery area. This was a trip of about five city blocks each way and at double-time.

There had not been a jump since the 25th of January so I did not miss anything while home on furlough. One of the D battery men must have gotten lonesome for a jump, or had a few too many, because while on a week-end pass in Charlotte he rigged up a parachute from a bed sheet and jumped from a second story window of a hotel. He spent all day Sunday at the police station while they investigated him.

The under-secretary of war, I don't even know his name, was supposed to visit Camp Mackall on Saturday, April 22nd and I volunteered to work on a gun crew to fire the salute. I hoped for good weather and maybe a chance to take a picture. No further mention was made of the event which leads me to conclude that I was not selected for the gun crew and may have missed the event completely. It may be that the visit was canceled, I don't remember.

Our training switched to a heavy concentration on infantry tactics. Classes were held on the 60mm and 81mm mortars, the .30 caliber machine-gun, the M-1 Garand rifle and the .45 cal. sub-machinegun. Along with learning about the arms of the infantry there were lessons on hand-to-hand combat with knives and some judo. It's like insurance and you hope you don't have to use it.

Sometime between the twenty-second of April and the tenth of May mother and Dad came to Mackall for a visit. I still had to continue with my normal training while they were in camp but did not draw any extra duties such as guard or K.P. It was great to see them and they seemed to enjoy seeing the camp and meeting some of the officers and men that I was with every day.

My last letter was written on the 28th of April and soon after that we left for our port of embarkation at Hampton Roads, Virginia. I wrote home from Camp Patrick Henry and said that it was almost like a reception camp and that the food was an improvement over Camp Mackall. Our training went on as usual and the one day that stands out in my memory, was one, if not the last day at Patrick Henry, when we had to run through the obstacle course. I could not get through the course because of a sinus headache. Every time I moved my head it felt as though it would split open, even the sunlight was painful to me. I was afraid that

they would not let me go overseas with the 460th if I did not get through, but somehow I squeezed by and shipped out with them.