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MailCall No. 2217

June 8, 2014

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

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D-Day – June 6, 1944

General Eisenhower's Message Sent Just Prior to the Invasion:



Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon a great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened, he will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man to man. Our air offensive

has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our home fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessings of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

-- Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

Listen to General Eisenhower's Message



MailCall News

My Most Sincere Regrets go out to Helen, Family, and 517th Family and Friends of **Harold "Hal" Beddow!** Since I don't always open the Mail Calls when Bob sends them out, this sad news is late in coming.

I believe Hal and Helen were at every 517th Reunion I attended. Got a kick out of Hal's stories and love of life. Know Helen did A Lot of work on ALL Reunions but I never heard Hal complain once. As long as he was with his buddies, he was Happy.

In my humble opinion, the Good Lord allowed Hal one more Jump. However, instead of gravity pulling Trooper Hal to Earth, he was Lifted on Eagle's Wings to that Eternal Poolside Resort, where many of his 517th Band of Brothers were waiting for him with an iced glass of Scotch!

God Bless,

Kenton "Kent" Floyd Immerfall Nephew of 1st Lt. Floyd A. Stott - "I" Co. 3rd Bat. 517th PRCT

I went to a ceremony on the battle ship Texas on the 6 th of June which is the 70th anniversary of the Normandy invasion & received the medal of knight of the French legion of honor. It is very beautiful. 36 of us received the medal at one time.

Melvin Trenary

Good evening,

My grandpa **Frank Grbinich** was the 517th PRCT Association's president from 1985-1987. He passed away in 1995 when I was 9 years old. I hope to meet some men that may have known my grandpa through this email group. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully, Alex Hunt AlexHunt08@gmail.com 404-723-5350

Please convey to Joanne our how grateful we all are for her service as Treasurer (besides all the other things she had done for the 517th and its members and their families (will always be thankful for how she looked out for Dad at one reunion that I couldn't attend and he didn't feel well and gave everyone a fright). Words can't express that gratitude. Your Dad left remarkable "chips off the old block" in the two of you. God bless you both and Mimsey for picking up the reins.

Pat Seitz and Alan Greer

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Subj: Trooper addition to 517th

Lt Jerome Vincent Callahan (Chicago) Deceased May 7 30, 1997 Recpt: Bronze Star and Purple Heart

After the war "Jerry" worked in Illinois State Attorney's office as an investigator on major cases; continuing his career in law enforcement retiring as a District Commander.

Married to Elizabeth Katherine McMahon when he enlisted after Pearl Harbor, Jerry joined the 517th at age 28. At home in Chicago was his wife and young son, Reed. After the war Jerry had two more children, Nancy and Daniel. A man of honor, duty and quiet dignity. His loyalty ran a mile and just as deep.

Nancy Callahan Carlson

Jerry Callahan received a Purple Heart in addition to Bronze Star.



Ben Barrett and **Dick Seitz** were both age 26 in 1944, and they claimed to be among the oldest in the 517^{th,} (not counting **Gen. Lou Walsh** and **Col. Rupert Graves**). Looks like **Jerry Callahan** was a couple of years older. – BB

MailCall # 2217

Questions about James J. Pacey and Purple Medal 517 prct unit

Hello....My name is Kimberly Zonaras from Dayton Ohio. My husband James Zonaras is the nephew of **James J. Pacey** who died in France in September, 1944. I was working on some geneology for him and found both this website and another...the US Militaria that both contain the same information about him. My Mother-in Law Catherine Pacey Zonaras is James J. Pacey's still living sister.

In both the bio here on this site....and a forum in the Militaria site...there are pictures of his purple heart. Apparently a man named Lubos had purchased the medal from another seller and was asking about James.

My questions are....is there some way to get in contact with the man who has the Purple Medal. The family still remaining living has no idea why the Purple Medal is in Europe instead of here with the family. We would be most interested in knowing if Lubos knows who had it before him and we'd love to try to get to the bottom of it. My husband, being his eldest nephew...and his mother would certainly love to have it back in the family..but if that's not possible, we would love to know more about it's journey.



My name and address is Kimberly Zonaras daughter in law of Catherine Pacey Zonaras (of California) 2227 E. Rahn Rd Kettering OH 45440 937-974-2862 or 937-567-0702

thank you so much for any help you can be. My husband is named after **James J. Pacey** as you can see and anything we can find out would be so much appreciated.

Yours, Kimberly Zonaras

I'm **Lt Warren Caulfield**'s daughter and my husband and I are planning on attending the 70th anniversary proceedings in Le Muy and surrounding areas. We reserved for Aug 12-19 but we would like to know if anyone has any specifics on what and where. I have sent an email to **J. Mickael Soldi** but haven't heard anything yet and thought perhaps you would have more info.

Thanks for doing such a wonderful job on MailCall. Each time it comes out I am more in awe of their sacrifices.

Airborne all the way **Shelly Azeff**

MailCall # 2217

Hello, my name is Keith Chan, I am wondering if this is Howard Hensleigh who served in World War 2 Keith Chan

Yes, Keith. I served in the 517th Parachute Infantry through 5 major battles in the ETO as Machinegun/bazooka platoon leader, S-2 and S-3 of the 3rd Battalion. **Howard Hensleigh**

Hello Howard, nice to meet you, I was wondering if you could explain how it was like on one of your major battles as I am currently writing an essay on World War 2. Keith Chan

Dear Keith,

A major battle is a term used to describe a major campaign, for example the Rome-Arno major battle included taking Rome on June 5, 1944 (the day before D Day in Normandy), but it also included pushing the German army all the way up the Italian "boot" almost to the Po River.

For that reason, I will not describe an entire major battle, but just one part of what was known as the Battle of the Bulge beginning on the 16th of December 1944 and lasting a month or two into the winter of 1945.

Background: After the Rome-Arno campaign in Italy, my outfit the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team (the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the 596th Parachute Combat Engineering Company) as a part of the First Airborne Task Force, parachuted into Southern France. After we completed our invasion mission of providing and "umbrella" to keep German forces from reaching the seaborne forces on the beaches of S. France, we pushed the German army all the way back into Italy. This kept us on the lines in constant combat for more than ninety days. We than shipped to northern France in 40 and 8 box cars and were to have Christmas in training for a winter offensive. The Germans beat us to the draw and attacked the weakest part of the Allied lines on December 16, 1944. At that time the troopers of the 517th were 18th Airborne Corps under **Lt. General Ridgeway**. My Third Battalion of the 517th PIR was credited for retaking Manhay, Belgium, the first territory retaken from the Germans as we began to turn the Bulge inside out. We were ordered to take it at all costs. Manhay is a road center the Germans could use to fan out their armored attacks if they could hold onto it. Manhay was occupied by an SS battalion, dug in with good fields of fire. Here is how it happened.

General Ridgeway had pulled our G Company out to guard his 18th Corps command post. So we had only two line companies for the attack. We also had the battalion Headquarters Company which contained the communications section, the 81 heavy mortar platoon and the machinegun/bazooka platoon.

After heavy artillery concentrations on the town our attack was ordered to begin at two in the morning of December 27, 1944. Our attack order was a column of companies with I Company leading, then H Company and Hq. 3rd. The artillery lifted at 2 o'clock as planned and **Lt. Stott'**s platoon of I Company led the attack on the run. Then some big Allied artillery unit fired a salvo which was both late and short. It killed Lt. Stott and half of this platoon. The rest of the battalion ran through this carnage and fought house to house, fox hole to fox hole and had Manhay under control within two hours. We eliminated many of the enemy and sent about fifty of the worst German troops of the hated SS Divisions back to regimental headquarters as prisoners of war. Then German artillery opened up on us and we repelled three counter attacks. We were pulled out the afternoon of January 1, 1945, for other operations of the 18th Airborne Corps. to reverse the losses occasioned by the Bulge.

I'm not sure this will help, but I trust you will have a good report. We of the 517th wish you the best in your school year which is soon to be finished.

Sincerely yours, Howard Hensleigh

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Hi Bob, I just wanted to respond -- through you -- to Jean-Loup Gassend:

Jean-Loup, no need to apologize for not listing the names of the men pictured on page 67 of *Operation Dragoon: Autopsy of a Battle*. I completely understand the difficulties involved in wanting to have accurate identifications wherever possible. And, I have to say, I think you did a wonderful job throughout the book! As far as my Dad -- **Edward Smith** -being with the 509th prior to joining the 517th: I don't know why that was the case. I will try to do some research. However, he wasn't injured prior to the Invasion of Southern France. In fact, following those several months, he went on to The Battle of the Bulge. There the war ended for him in February 1945 when he sustained a severe bullet wound to the ankle. He was first transported to a hospital in Paris, then London, and then back to the States.

I also would like to share the following email that I sent to Bob Sirott and Marianne Murciano earlier today. They are a husband and wife team who do a radio program on Chicago's WGN-AM station weekdays from noon to 3. I sent a similar email to Steve Bertrand, a news anchor on WGN who also has a Saturday morning show about books. I just want to get the word out about your amazing book.



Thanks for your wonderful work,

Shirley Catterson

Hi Marianne and Bob,

I was listening yesterday when you were talking about D-Day, the Invasion of Normandy. There's another 70th anniversary coming up on August 15th -- the commemoration of the Invasion of Southern France -- or, as it was nicknamed by the G.I.'s, "The Champagne Campaign."

My Dad, Edward Smith, was a proud paratrooper with the 517th Parachute Combat Infantry Regiment; and he jumped into France as a participant in that campaign. (Prior to that, he made combat jumps into North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Then, he went from Southern France right into The Battle of the Bulge.) He passed away suddenly in 2001 at the age of 78.

A few years after he was gone, I found the 517th's website on-line. It is a marvelous website, and he would have loved it! While browsing photographs posted there, I was surprised and delighted to come across several of my Dad! Pictures I'd never seen -- and I'm sure that he had never seen. One of them is now on page 67 (as well as on the back cover) of an awesome new book, just released, about the Invasion of Southern France. It's called *Operation Dragoon: Autopsy of a Battle. The Allied Liberation of the French Riviera, August - September 1944* by Jean-Loup Gassend. I first learned about the book about a month ago while reading "MailCall," the weekly, on-line newsletter of the 517th. I ordered the book from Amazon. When it arrived, I immediately started paging through the breath-taking array of

photographs inside, and again -- was so surprised -- to come across the picture of my Father in the book and on the cover. (I've attached the picture for you to see. My Dad is the fella in the middle.)

This book is also something I wish my Dad had lived long enough to see. It contains hundreds and hundreds of first-hand recollections of G.I.'s, German soldiers, and French inhabitants, among others. It is an amazing, interesting, thrilling read. The research that Gassend put into its 500+ pages is astounding. I'm about halfway through *Operation Dragoon* now, and I cannot recommend it highly enough to do it justice. Please check it out, Marianne and Bob.

Thank you for your very entertaining and just-plain-fun show!

All the best, Shirley Catterson

On Jun 5, 2014 2:22 PM, "HOWARD E HENSLEIGH, wrote: Dear Alison,

WELCOME HOME!

Seventy years ago today we took Rome. Seventy years ago tomorrow the Allies hit the Normandy beaches.

Now that you have had the grand tour with your pal Alice, are you going to be able to settle down to work?

Love, Grandfather H. (Howard E Hensleigh)

From: Alison Quinn

Dear Poppy,

Happy 70th anniversary of the Normandy D Day! And happy belated Veterans Day. I hope there were some celebrations at the VA.

Thank you for the welcome home!! I'm very glad to be home although I had a fantastic time in Europe and miss traveling. I'm taking the rest of this week to rest up, unpack, and catch up with everyone, but next week I'm going to crack down on studying for my Boards Exams and preparing to move to Virginia for my residency.

Thank you again for contacting Claire on my behalf. I had a wonderful time staying with Roland and Patricia Satow. They were so sweet and showed me so much. I have lots of photos I want to send you from Sospel and Col de Braus. Once I get them on my computer I'll send them your way. I also enjoyed reading about your experiences there and thanks for getting back to me so quick about you being in the 3rd Battalion. I actually found you in a book that Roland had soon after I emailed my mom which was neat.

Hope you're doing well!

Love, Alison

MailCall # 2217

Ten years ago my Dad was invited back to France to receive his Legion of Honor Medal on June 5, 2004. Tim and I went with him. It was a great experience. Then on June 6th we had to get up at 3 am to ride a train from Paris to the Normandy beaches to get there by 8 am. There we were taken to the American cemetery on at Omaha beach, where we sat right in front of President Bush and Chirac. See the attached pictures I took. During our visit we went onto Omaha Beach. See the picture I have attached. I cannot see how any of our soldiers were able to get off of that beach alive. It is a long ways from the shore to the cliffs.

Anyway, I want to express my sincere thanks to all World War II veterans that put their lives on the line, with many that never returned home again. They truly are the greatest generation. Thank you for allowing me to speak English and not German and enjoy the freedoms I do. I am especially thankful to the men of the 517th and what they did on August 15, 1944 and beyond. I just wished our country would remember Operation Dragoon and what these men did to keep the world free.

Lory Curtis, son of Bud Curtis HQ, 1st BN.



Presidents Chirac and Bush giving their speeches at the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach

Mr. Michel Barnier, Minister of Foreign Affairs pinning on Dad's Legion of Honor June 5, 2004, at about 11:00 A.M



Omaha Beach

MailCall # 2217





Photos from Irma and Arnold Targnion, Trois Ponts, Belgium

Dear friends of America, we are especially thinking of you during this day as we could follow the ceremonies in Normandy (on TV) In may, we attending many ceremonies on Memorial Day, in Bastogne, Henri-Chapelle, in all the villages in this area. I send some pictures of those events. Here is Henri-Chapelle on May 24th. We will never forget the sacrifices of thos young heroes.







WANNE (Trois-Ponts) 517th monument - 2014 may 8th -wreath laying ceremony

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Bastogne - 2014 may 16th - the Mardasson ceremony



4 4 - Classon



Wereth (Amel) Belgium may 17th



517th monument - Soy/Hotton.....



US MEMORIAL WERETH dedicated to the Wereth 11 (killed by the SS on 1944 dec. 17th) and to all african american soldiers - ceremony MAY 17th

I just read the latest 517th Newsletter and saw a note about Memorial Day Remembrance. I thought your readers might appreciate the request made by my 8 year great grandson to his parents concerning Memorial Day and his interest about WW II Veterans. I never brought up the subject about WW II with him before as he was too young. Because of his surprising interest, I will now relate to him about his great uncle in Company H and our other family members in WW II including my sister's (a WW II Widow) VIP participation with Vice President Gore at the 50th Anniversary of V-J Day Ceremonies at Fort Myers. I will show him the 517th Website for him to peruse. I think we will have another generation 517th follower.

Please extend our thanks to Joanne for her service as Treasurer and for her effort in regaining the tax exemption for the 517th and our dealings with the IRS.

Frank Ramos

-----Original Message-----From: Frank M. Ramos Sent: Thu, May 29, 2014 9:32 pm Subject: Memorial Day Remembrance by an Eight Yeal Boy - Christian Basardo

Friends and Family:

Please allow me to indulge you with a unusual request made by my great grand son Christian to his parents for he and his young sister to do something special on Memorial Day for the Veterans.

I have enclosed the following message with pictures from my grand daughter to my wife and I about the "out of the blue" request from her eight year old son with his sister, Sophia, to pay homage to the Veteran's buried at Rosecran's National Cemetery in San Diego. His father is an active duty Master Chief, Petty Officer, U.S.N., who has served recent tours on land and sea duty in Afghanistan and in the Persian Gulf.

I was so taken back by his thoughtful request that I thought you would appreciate the empathy Christian has about veterans that he picked up from somewhere. It is timely after I saw a major TV network segment where they interviewed and asked college students on the beach in Maryland about what Memorial Day is about and their total ignorance about this day of remembrance of our veterans: "it takes an eight year old!"

Here is the email message:

'Christian wanted to spend his day off from School this past Mon.(Memorial day) visiting Ft. Rosecrans cemetery to honor the military who have served our Country. He told Sophia about his plan and they came to Jesse and I to ask if we would take them. Christian asked me on Sunday, if he and Sophia could place 5 flowers each on a tombstone. We bought a dozen roses and they each got 6. They really enjoyed doing this, and it's now going to become a tradition of ours every Memorial Day.

It brings tears of joy to know that Christian is so thoughtful of thinking of others, especially our fallen service members. I am very proud of both of my kids to have wanted to spend their day off at a cemetery and had so many questions about WWII. Enjoy some of the pics I was able to capture.'





Christian and Sophia Basardo at the Rosecran's National Cemetery in San Diego

Hi, Bob and Shelly -

Sure - we do need a kind of Jump List - it was Gene's idea 5 years ago and a darn good one. This is a daunting trip!

Shelly, welcome aboard. I am an informal point of contact here for the 517, just so we can make sure everyone on the other side of the pond knows we're coming. This is especially crucial for the 15 August formal ceremonies at the Rhone, where they need the guest list well in advance.

When you say you have reservations, does that mean you have rooms? Excellent.

You should know that Leo Dean will be in a reenactment static line jump (jumping tandem and higher than the reenactors) on 13 August.

Keep watching email and feel free to call me. Happy to share information - but it's not like we get a lot from France much before we go there.

Thanks so much -

Claire

Greetings Claire, Karen and Gene.

First, I am so glad to begin being in the loop; but must clarify something first off. I am **George Ross**'s oldest son Jeff. You have met my younger brother Jess. I am six years older than him and better looking.

So, Gene, Jesse did load all the photos to the website, and he was the bartender in the backyard of mom and dad's when the reunion was in Minneapolis. Both he and brother George dressed in uniform for that evening. They both still talk about that.

Now Claire, to answer your questions. My wife, Diane, and I returned last Sunday from two weeks in France. We spent a few days in Paris and ten days in Provence. We were in Nice for three days and then in Aix for eight days. While in Nice we took a bus ride to St Paul de Vence. Spent some interesting time with a town historian discussing Dragoon. 3rd Division liberated that town. Saw the commemorative plaque.

Before we left the US and while we were there, I had been in contact with **Mickael Soldi**, who has the 517th museum. We did not have a cell phone and were only using Viber while we were there. I had hoped to meet with him but it just didn't happen. Poor planning on my part and not knowing what to expect. However, we still were able to have an exceptional day following dad's road map which charted out the movements of the regiment and F Company in particular.

We started our day at Sainte Roseline on Tuesday morning. Drove the few miles to the DZ and from there followed dad's map as far as Coursegoules. That took us six hours. It is totally amazing terrain. Dad had always said that in is for donkeys and horses. Most of the time we had the car in third gear. All up hill. We arrived in Coursegoules at about 4 PM and had to get back to Aix where we were staying. So, we headed south and back to A8 and onto Aix. Needless to say, this certainly whet my appetite to get back for the 70th. In part, because of the interaction with some of the younger folks who I encountered who were aware and knowledgeable of Dragoon; and because of my own personal connection to that place through dad and the time I just spent there.

Brother Jess and I have been talking about making the trip together in August. We would just like to have some details as to what, where and when. We live in Minneapolis.

My questions:

Dates - August 9 - 20 ? Flying into Nice and meeting or what? Are people moving together as a group or on your own? Staying together at hotels?

Await your reply,

jeff rossi



In last week's MailCall, we had a note looking for information about **Capt. Boffy** and the 1er régiment de chasseurs parachutistes who jumped with the 1st Airborne Task Force to serve as guides and translators. Here are some photos of a monument in La Motte recognizing the American, British and French Troops who participated in Operation Dragoon.





Administrivia

- If you miss any MailCalls, they are all available online at <u>http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/</u>
- 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: <u>MailCall@517prct.org</u>
- 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 Miriam Boyle Kelly 19 Oriole Court Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Army Life, as told by PFC William B. Houston (Part 6)

Another chapter from **William Houston**'s biography is on the following pages. This chapter covers *"We Arrive in Italy"* from May to August 1944.

Next week: "Jump Into France"

WE ARRIVE IN ITALY

It was on the thirty first of May that we docked in Naples, Italy. At the station we loaded into railroad cars which took us to Bagnoli, a suburb of Rome. From the railroad station we hiked to the "Crater", an extinct volcano which it was claimed that it was a hunting grounds for Italian royalty. The Crater itself was a picture postcard scene, round, full of lush vegetation and about 808 feet below the rim of the volcano. On the floor of this beautiful crater we set up our tents, all in neat, straight rows. A road ran along the steep slope of the crater and up to the top - the road was not always used by the G.I.s who went to town, drank too much vino and then tried to take a shortcut straight down the side of the crater, Usually they could be identified the following morning by their cuts and bruises.

Sometime during the first or second week of June, I am uncertain of the date because we could not name locations or dates in our letters, I had a chance to go to Naples or Pompeii for a day so I chose Pompeii and feel that it was a good choice. On the way from Bagnoli to Pompeii I did get a chance to see the Italian countryside. It was interesting but visiting Pompeii itself was the most interesting experience of the trip. I saw a mosaic of bear in the doorstep of a house which I recalled seeing pictured in one of my text books. I was fascinated to see plumbing with lead pipes used in some of the better houses built before the birth of Christ. I even visited a house of ill fame but it has been closed for about 2,008 years - either poor management or business was too slow.

It was June and I was spending early summer in Italy! In a sense I consider myself lucky. The scenery was beautiful but I don't like the people very well. It was not all their fault, it's the was the war and its effect. Most of the people seem to speak a little English about the first thing I heard was, "Hey Joe, gotta cigarette?", and they go around singing, "Pistol Packin' Mama" and "Oh Johnny" just as plain as I could.

We had a ride in a third class Italian train with wooden seats and doors on the side of the railroad car - just like in the movies.

We had our first payday overseas and we got paid in "Military Currency", money printed by the Allies for use in occupied countries. When we used it in town for our little business deals, the Italians would not accept Italian currency, but when it came to giving change they always tried to pass the Italian stuff off on us. At first we did not know what they were trying to do but soon we learned and, from then on, we refused to accept the Italian stuff.

Italian money strikes me as funny. It seems that the greater the value of the currency the larger the size of the piece of paper it is printed on. It makes you wonder if they could cut two pieces of paper to the same size, even if they tried. Most of the money was so large that we could not get it into our billfolds. Thank heavens they were more realistic with the military currency.

Our P.X. supplies were supposed to come in on the night of June the eighth so two of us were detailed to pick up the goods and take it back to our area. Like everything you do in the service we had to wait for the stuff. You would have a hard time believing all of the things they have at the P.X. - it makes you wonder how they got so much merchandise over to Europe.

My tent mate was the bugler and he tried to teach me how to blow the bugle. My progress has been extremely fast: within two days I went from being unable to blow a single note to where I could blow two sour notes. The bugler not only talked in his sleep but he also sang. I had a large piece of rough concrete which I keep in the middle of the tent to keep him on his own side.

I saw a billboard! This may sound silly because there are so many back home but I saw my first one in Italy after being here for almost a month.

Finally the guns and vehicles, which had been shipped separately, caught up with us and on June 14th we shipped out of Naples on LSTs and headed north for Civittavecchia. The trip took all night and about half of the next day and was anything but a vacation on a cruise ship. As we boarded the LST we were issued C-rations and from then on we were more or less on our own. There were no bunks on board so we had to make out as best we could. I found a 3/4 ton weapons carrier and spent the night in the back of it. I did find some rations in the truck which included chocolate bars - these helped to make the trip more enjoyable in spite of the heat.

Around noon of the second day we pulled into Civittavecchia where the LST dropped its ramp and we marched ashore. It was here that I started to form my opinion about the local population, an opinion that was not too complimentary. While marching through the city a boy about ten years old dashed into our ranks and snatched a carton of cigarettes from one of our men. The man was two or three ranks ahead of me and the cigarettes were strapped to the outside of his musette bag. In a matter of seconds they were gone- it was probably not the first time a carton of cigarettes had been obtained in this manner. It was then and there that I decided that the Italians could not be trusted. Our bivouac area was only a couple of miles from the beach and while hiking to it I saw how much damage had been done by the bombing and shelling.

From Civittavecchia we were trucked to a location near Grosseto where we went into action along side of the 36th Division. The 36th was made up of Texas National Guard units. They were battle seasoned veterans and were only too willing to relate their exploits. This took place on the 17th of June and later that day I was lying in a wheat field wondering what I could do to amuse myself when suddenly a German 88mm shell landed close and solved my problem. I decided to dig a deep foxhole, one so deep that I may have to install and elevator, but the shells stopped flying and I stopped digging.

That evening, at about dusk - a German plane dropped its auxiliary gas tank, and it landed about fifty yards from me and in our bivouac area. It sounded like a bomb, movie style, coming down and scared me but after I crawled out from under the truck I found that it was only a gas tank. I could hear the plane but could not see it and the tank had German markings on it.

One evening at about this time, although I don't remember the exact date, we had pulled into a bivouac area after dark and as we were pitching our tents an officer cried out, "Gas, phosgene!" so we quickly put our gas-masks on, A short time later we found out that the over conscientious officer was standing near a haystack and mistook the smell of newmown hay for that of phosgene gas so sounded the alarm.

One day, early in our combat experience, we were shelled by the Germans and they scored a direct hit on our mess truck, The truck went up in a huge pillar of black smoke and we were condemned to eating C-rations and K-rations for a period of time. Fortunately, nobody was killed or injured by the shelling.

The civilians are always on the move in Italy. The roads are clogged with people and their possessions. Some are walking, others are on bicycles, some are pulling two wheel farm carts by hand and still others are riding on donkey carts. There is always the wine jug in a wicker basket, which reached halfway up the side of the jug, with them. The twenty-sixth of June was a day of mixed events. Some German shells landed in our area but not close

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enough to worry us. Then an American artillery outfit to the rear of us, had a misfire and gave us a close call. At that point we started to reequip ourselves with M-1 Garand rifles, '03 Springfields and German Mauser rifles. From this we learned a lesson. If you fired a German gun, rifle in this case, Americans can identify it as German by the sound and soon there was a large number of G.I.s looking for the Germans. It just is not a good policy to stir up so much action. Later that day we took a short walk and found a German half-track which had a cab and hood identical to our Ford trucks at home. We also went for a ride on a German bicycle and a motorcycle to round out the activities of the day.

That evening another outfit moved in to relieve us. They had been a National Guard unit from Duluth which had been activated and shipped to Italy. I was told that there was a similar outfit from Minneapolis but I was not able to find any of them. After we were relieved we went back to a rest area: our time on the line was simply considered part of our training - very realistic training, I'd say.

On June 28th I went swimming in the Mediterranean Sea during the afternoon and to a movie in the evening. It was a thrill to swim in the Mediterranean but I don't like the taste of salt water and of the feeling it leaves on your skin after you get out of the water.

My twenty-first birthday was not a great event. In the evening the band put on an outdoor concert before it got dark and after dark there was a movie, also out of doors.

Since the 517th was in reserve I was able to spend some time in Rome. On the fifth of June Jim Andersen and I set out to see the city together. We went to the Vatican first and Jim, a Mormon, reminded me at a reunion in 1989 that, as we stood in the center of St. Peter's Square, I told him that this was the center of the Christian world.

From St. Peter's Basilica we went to the Vatican Palace where the Pope held an audience and gave his blessing in Italian, French and English. The colorful Swiss Guards were on duty , dressed in blue, red, and yellow uniforms with black helmets.

Jim and I then took a horse drawn cab to the Colosseum. On the way we passed by the Bictor Emmanuel Memorial and the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We also visited the Amphitheater of Imperial Rome and the Arch of Constantine before taking a cab along the Appian Way to the Catacomb of St. Callisto where we had to pay six cents for candles which we used for light in the catacomb.

The cab which we took to the catacomb was an old motor car, I don't know how old but it had a right hand drive and the driver had an assistant. The assistant was a young lad and it was his job to hold his hand out the left side window to signal a left turn when the driver told him to. If the driver chose to make a V-turn on a narrow street, which could be almost any street in Rome, the assistant helped him to turn the steering wheel. If there was a horn it probably did not work. I deduced that the horn did not work because when someone was in his way the driver pounded on the outside of the door with the palm of his hand - sometimes this could be heard over the noise of the motor.

We went to a 6.1, restaurant where the meal was free but we had to pay ten cents for table service.

After eating we went to the Roman Forum and then to the Castle of Angels. By that time it was time to meet our trucks and as we left Rome the moon came up over the city. It had been a full, exciting and interesting day and one of the best history lessons I have ever had.

There was an incident on July the 26th which caused me to write home and express how thankful that we were fighting in Europe rather than in the U.S.A. A small Italian boy had his thumb blown off that day by a shell. It may have been a German or American shell but that made little matter to him, his thumb was gone forever. The boy was too young to know that shells are dangerous.

One day while in Italy, I went to an Italian barber for a shave. First he shaved me with his straight razor then wiped my face off, sponged it, put on a couple of kinds of lotion, combed and brushed my hair and put so much tonic on it that it ran down my ears, then sprinkled cologne all over me. He also trimmed my moustache - all for fifteen cents.

On the seventeenth of July we were treated to a U.S,O, show. I did not record anything about it except that it was pretty good and I enjoyed it. It was a treat to hear some of the recent songs.

Around the middle of July we moved to Frascati, a town about eleven miles east of Rome. The bivouac was in an olive grove on the side of a steep hill. At the top of the hill was our eating area and the mess truck. After we finished each meal we dumped our garbage into a G.I.can. At this point there were always a few children standing near and asking for the scraps. I never did find out whether they ate them or fed them to the farm animals. Nevertheless, most of us gave the kids what we had left in our mess-kits then washed our mess-kits on one G.I. cans of hot water and rinsed them in the second can.

At the bottom of the hill was a flat field which served as our drill field and training area. At one end of this field was a spring but we were not allowed to drink water from it water which looked so cool and refreshing. The local women would stop at the spring to wash their clothes but I cannot recall seeing them drink the water either. A short distance away less than a city block, was a large house surrounded by a stone wall. The top of the wall had the bottom sections of wine bottles cemented in place with the jagged, broken edges in an upright position to discourage anyone who might attempt to climb over it. This house served as our headquarters. We lived in tents in the olive grove but they were not the usual pup tents, instead the shelter halves were tied to the branches of the olive trees to keep out the sun and dew. It was warm enough to sleep outside comfortably and I do not remember of it raining once. Who I tented with I do not recall but I do remember that both our tent and yard was well furnished. We had a low fence around out property, a mail-box, and a lawn chair sitting out in the yard. Inside we had a bed, a wine cellar and a crude water-cooler which cooled drinking water by evaporation. The fence, about a foot high, the lawn chair and bed were made from tree branches which were tied together. The water cooler was a can filled with stones and tied to a low branch of the olive tree. Directly under this can there was a second can and between the cans there was a string. The string was anchored to a stone in the can, passed through a hole in the center of the bottom of the upper can and ended up in the lower can. We would pour water into the upper can, the water would flow over the stones and follow the string to the lower can. During this process the water would be cooled several degrees. It was a slow process and did not remove the water purifying chemicals, it only made the water seem better because it was cooler.

Our training continued. One "game" that was played over and over went like this: the parts of our howitzer were spread out on the field, as if they had been dropped by parachute, the whistle would sound and all four gun crews would compete to see who could find the parts and assemble their gun in the shortest time. Even those in sections other than the gun crews had to take their turns. This was in case of an injury or fatality on a combat jump.

Occasionally Father Guenette, our Catholic chaplain, would come around in his jeep and say Mass. This was done out in the open and the hood of the jeep served as the altar. At

Mass general absolution was given as a matter of routine and all fasting and abstaining was suspended.

While in Frascati a new business developed, that of stealing jeeps from other outfits, stationed in or visiting, Rome and bringing them back to our area. Once in our area, the original unit designation on the bumper was painted out and our unit number stenciled on in their place. Our officers looked the other way and, at the same time, furnished the stencils, then the renumbered jeeps had to be dispersed in wooded areas in case of an inspections by higher headquarters. When we left for the jump into France we had to leave numerous jeeps behind, it was too risky to turn them in and we could not take them with.

We were able, rather required, to go swimming in a beautiful lake about five miles from our bivouac area near Frascati. This meant a hike over the mountains and through the vineyards to Lake Albano in the July and August heat, the hottest part of the year. Lake Albano was beautiful, nearly a perfect circle of blue water in an extinct volcano with a large castle near the shoreline. It was not until 1984, while visiting the area, that I found out that the castle was Castle Gandolfo, the summer residence of the Pope. Because we swam in this lake which is so close to the castle, I often make the statement that I used to swim in the Pope's swimming pool. On these hikes we were allowed only one canteen full of water but that order was easy to beat, we simply did not drink any water on the way to the lake, then while swimming we "accidentally" swallowed enough water to satisfy our thirst. The trip back was not so bad because we knew we had a canteen full of water and could ration it accordingly until we got back. On the first trip to Lake Albano we decided to shorten the trip by taking a shortcut through a railroad tunnel. There was no danger of trains because the tracks had been destroyed by shells or bombs in many places, so we marched through the dark tunnel. Stumbled may be a better word to describe the trip since only the lead man had a flashlight and the rest of us followed by holding our hand on the shoulder of the man ahead of us. It saved a trip over the top of the mountain and seemed to be such a good idea that we used the same route on the return trip. Before we got all of the way back to our area we found a good reason to avoid the tunnel - it was full of fleas and we all had at least some fleas on us. As we neared our bivouac area we were called to a halt on the opposite side of the road from our camp, ordered to strip and put our clothes in piles, then both we and the clothes were sprayed with D.D.T. Next came the dash across the road, in the nude, to our tents. After that incident we had the choice of going through the tunnel or climbing over the top of the mountain - we chose the climb.

That was not the end of the flea story. A short time later I was on pass in Rome and while there was bothered by an itching sensation under my belt buckle so I stopped at an army first aid station for a quick check. Sure enough, one lone surviving flea had decided to make his home in that warm area. After he was removed and some medication applied I felt better and within a few days the red spot disappeared.

If you could not get to town there was always Merle "Mac" McMorrow to turn to. Mac was our battery barber but he certainly was not a professional barber - other members of the battery will back me up on that statement. At times we were so desperate that we had to chose between one of Mac's haircuts or no haircut and a gig. One thing, Mac did make house calls. He would come right to your tent with his tools in hand and ready to work. Just to make sure that he would be compensated for his work he required that each person pay in advance and once the money was in his hand there was no recourse - he had the money and you were stuck with the haircut, regardless of how it looked. Of course the customer furnished the towel and a box to sit on, this entitled the customer to his choice of seat location. My personal preference was to sit with the loud speaker and music to my back and

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a softball game in front of me. Then Mac would start in, chop away wherever he pleased and in a few minutes you had a haircut (?). Neither the customer or the barber seemed too concerned as how the finished job looked because you were not going anywhere important anyhow.

It was my unfortunate luck to have K.P. again on August first, but some good came with the bad - it was also payday and P.X. day.

Early in the morning on the 8th of August, so early that the sun had not even thought about getting up, Sgt. Westbrook sent a message that three of us were to report for K.P. At first it was not too bad, just the regular run of things, but later I found myself cooking. I had never seen so many chickens in my life! First into the pan of flour went each chicken, then into the pan to fry - some came out raw, others burned and some even came out just right. They must have forgotten how hard I worked and slaved over the hot stove during the day because that evening they had me making pancake batter and syrup for breakfast the following morning. Some big lumps developed in the syrup so we fished them out and threw them away - it made no difference since I did not plan to show up for breakfast anyhow.

All of the dastardly deeds of Sgt. Westbrook were overlooked the following day when, as I was writing a letter, he tossed a can of beer into my tent. That evening a few of us went to a movie in town and saw "The Male Animal". It was pretty good even though most of the actors were from the army.

On the tenth of August the entire combat team was restricted to the bivouac area. There were no passes and any letters written between then and the upcoming jump were held until after the jump had been made. We were issued small books with French phrases in them such as "Where are the Germans?", "How many are there?", "How many tanks do they have?" along with useful phrases to be used in civilian relations and hints on how to act in France. With this help we were supposed to be able to ask questions, but how were we supposed to understand the answers?

Sand tables were set up to give us an idea of the layout of the area we would be jumping into but we still were not told of the location of our B.Z. Our only hint was that it would be in France, this we knew because of the phrase book. The battalion was then moved to an airfield at Canino, near Rome, where we waited for the order to load the equipment and board the planes. The airfield was merely a pasture with a dusty runway, but the grass of the pasture made a good place to rest on. A short time before we boarded the planes we received some beer and there was a movie shown, "Stage Boor Canteen" if 1 remember correctly.

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