



# 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

## MailCall No. 2219

June 22, 2014

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

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Thunderbolt (Winter 2014)

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## MailCall News

To: **Jean-Luc FABRE**, Mayor of Fayence

Greetings!

I am the daughter of **Allan Johnson**, 596 Engineers. I will be traveling with him and two other 517 PRCT veterans, as well as the widow of **Hal Beddow** (1st Airborne Task Force) and several children of troopers, including the daughter of **Major Don Fraser** and the daughter of **Col. William Boyle**.

We remember the 2009 trip very well. We thank you for inviting us to Fayence and we would like to attend. We are leaving on 24 August and hope to be in Ste. Cezaire on 23 August.



My veterans are happy to hear that they are invited. Please let me know more details as we get closer to August.

Thank you very much for contacting us!

All the best -  
**Claire Johnson Giblin**



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### *This Week in 517<sup>th</sup> History*

From [Paratrooper's Odyssey - A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team](#)

Grosseto had been given up by the Germans without a fight. The town lies in a flood plain formed by the Ombrone River. Criss-crossed by irrigation canals, the plain is ten miles wide at the coast and narrows to three miles inland. Leading north from Grosseto are Highway 223 to Siena, inland, and Highway 1 to Follonica on the coast. North of the Ombrone plain a ridge titled the "Moscona Hills" rises to 300 meters at the point where it is crossed by Highway 223.

At daylight on June 18th the rifle battalions filed through Grosseto heading northeast on Highway 223. The order of march was 1st, Regimental Command Group, and 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Combat loads of ammunition had been issued. Riflemen were festooned with ammunition bandoleers and grenades. Machine gun crews carried 1,000 rounds apiece. Rain early in the morning had tapered off into a light drizzle. Most men wore raincoats or ponchos.

Mechanized cavalry had reportedly been through the area and found it clear, but the leading company of Major Boyle's 1st Battalion ran into a storm of machine gun fire as it entered the Moscona Hills. The troopers fanned out, took cover, and returned fire. Sergeant **Andrew Murphy** of B Company became the regiment's first fatality, hit by a sniper while directing his squad's 60mm mortar fire. In the lead of the column, **Major Boyle** had been well forward with his Command Group and was pinned down. Battalion executive **Herbert Bowlby** came up from the rear to direct C Company to bring down fire on the enemy from a hill to the right.

The Germans held a group of farm buildings in a small valley. With a platoon of B attached, C Company moved to the ridge overlooking the farm and opened fire. Little could be seen. Enemy machinegun fire clipped leaves from a hedgerow; within a few minutes ten C Company men were hit. German mortars went into action. Fortunately, the freshly-plowed ground was still soggy from the morning rain. Most of the mortar shell fragments went straight up, but two more men were hit. Without waiting for orders, three men went down into a ravine to fight their own personal war. In four trips they killed several Germans, captured and turned a mortar against the enemy, and took nineteen prisoners.\*

\* Staff Sergeant **Wilford Anderson** and PFC **Nolan Powell** were awarded the DSC for this action.

**Colonel Graves** had received no word from the 1st Battalion, but its predicament was obvious. He committed Lt. Col. **Dick Seitz'** 2nd Battalion to envelop the enemy from the right, and sent I Company from the 3rd Battalion to protect the eastern flank.

Battalion 81mm mortars and 460th guns opened up. Under this fire and with pressure on their front and flank, the Germans pulled out. They left behind over a hundred prisoners and considerable number of dead and wounded.

Coming forward to survey the scene, **Colonel Graves** found the 1st Battalion preparing the wounded and prisoners for evacuation. At the Aid Station Captain **Ben Sullivan** was administering blood plasma to Lieutenant **Howard Bacon** of B Company, who had been shot through the chest and lungs. He looked as though he was done for, but under Sullivan's care survived.\*

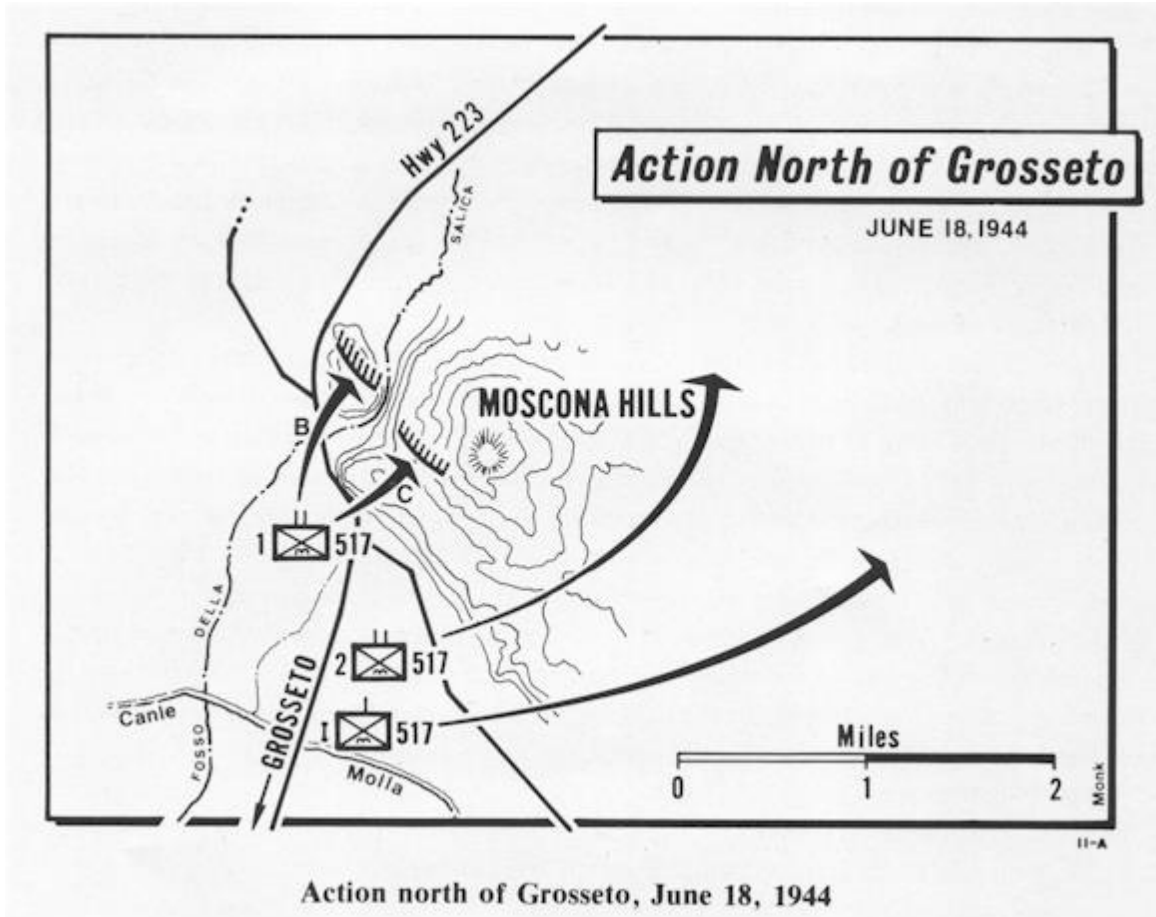


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\* Bacon fully recovered, returned to duty, and led a rifle platoon through the rest of the war.

In the early afternoon the advance was resumed. At twilight the Battalions took up rough perimeters and halted for the night. On the east I Company had become trapped in a minefield under machine gun fire. It was extricated after dark. The troopers were startled to find that the "German" force had been elements of the 162nd Turcoman Division,\* recruited from Moslem minorities in the Soviet Union. Although the 517th troopers had not really expected all Germans to be blond supermen eight feet tall, neither had they expected these scruffy, undersized Mongolian types. The enemy's tactics were also baffling. In a delaying action it is standard practice to open fire at long range, forcing the enemy to deploy prematurely. The Turcomen had not read the book and allowed the 517th to get almost on top of them, which proved their undoing.

\* The Army "Order of Battle Handbook" later listed the 162nd Turcoman Division as having been 'virtually destroyed' in Italy in June. After the war the remnants of the Division were returned to Soviet Russia, where it can be safely assumed that the destruction was completed.



In its all-important first day of combat the regiment suffered 40 to 50 casualties but inflicted several times that number upon the enemy. Far more important, the outfit had experienced the sights and sounds of combat and learned that it could fight and win.



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From **General Dick Seitz**, as reported in MailCall #722, 2004

Ben, in a recent Mail Call there was a question concerning the 517<sup>th</sup> combat near Folloncia. The following is my recall on this action Needless to say my recall is brief and sketchy.

On 24 June 1944 the 2nd Battalion was ordered to attack and seize the town of Folloncia. Folloncia is a small, beautiful resort town on the west coast of Italy along highway 1. On the morning of the 24th the battalion attacked through the eastern outskirts of the city against fairly heavy enemy resistance. At first it appeared the Germans intended to make a determined effort to hold the town however, after some intent fighting the Germans withdrew to the high ground north of the town. The battalion continued the attack and drove the Germans off the high ground. After a couple of hours the Germans launched a determined counter attack with tanks and Infantry. By this time the battalion was fairly well dug in and with tremendous support from our mortars and the 460th repulsed the counter attack. The very effective artillery support was the result of the artillery battalion forward observer, **Lt Tommy Tompson** who had taken an exposed position in front of the front line to direct point blank fire on the enemy tanks and advancing Infantry. The battalion sustained few casualties during the operation around Folloncia.

### *More MailCall News*

I am tardy in responding to the 1er Regiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes notes in several MailCalls.

During the years I have heard several remark that we had no French parachutists jump with us into Southern France. I do not recall seeing any of them shortly after the jump, but at that time things were so confused from an organizational standpoint that we did not know where a lot of people were including a couple of 3rd Bn. company commanders.

However, the 3rd Bn. 517 had two French paratroopers with is several weeks after the jump. They patrolled with us and were at home in the outfit because of **Rene Benoit's** ability to keep them involved with his French language ability. (From the Parisian viewpoint rusty French Canadian, but it bridged the gap.) As I recall they were with us until we reached Pierra Cava. They came to me after several weeks and said they were 40 or 50 Km. from home and asked if they could go home to see their parents. I gave them 5 day passes and a note to present to any GI vehicle driver stating they were with us and to give them a lift. I thought we might never see them again, but at the end of the 5 days they were back. I think they liked us and the food was not bad as at that time. **Joe Calder** the S-4 was getting five and ten in ones that weren't bad. (a rations box with five or ten rations in one box) We then had an incident where on outpost heard a rustle in the bushes by one who couldn't repeat the pass word. A poor mule got blasted. That got me thinking that the same thing could happen to our French friends, so I sent them back to their outfit. I have another vague recollection I'm not sure of. That is that when they got back to their outfits the CO wanted to court-martial them for being AWO, and that I wrote a note to say they were on duty with us and got them off.

At any rate they were definitely with us and were good soldiers. They may have jumped with **Johnny Nieler** and the S-2 section and I inherited them after Johnny went up to regiment and I replaced him as S-2.

Highest Airborne regards, **Howard Hensleigh**





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From **Subject:** Pacey's Purple Heart

Kimberly,

It does seem a shame that somehow this ended up outside the family. And after getting more info and records about Pacey from us, he probably thinks the value has gone up.

If the family did not sell it, then how could it have ended up with him? We know that he both it from another collector, but how did it get there? I hate to think that it was stolen or "found" and the family wasn't aware.

If you care, you might be able to get some satisfaction from the military. If you tell them the story, they could at least replace the medals for the family. I don't know if they would engrave the name on the Purple Heart as on the original, but you could ask.

See: <http://www.military.com/benefits/records-and-forms/military-awards-medals-decorations.html?comp=7000023431425&rank=4>

Good luck,

Bob Barrett

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**Subject:** Pacey's Purple Heart

Can't these relatives of **Pacey** get the Purple Heart Medal reissued through the government site or their congressman?. I had my father's original PH and got all of his medal reissued so I would have them complete. This took a year. His original PH was not engraved but when I got them reissued both the PH and the Bronze Star were engraved with his full name.

I got the info to do this from on 517<sup>th</sup> website.

**Dennis Sura**

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Oh thank you so much for all your help! I'm gonna definitely call our Senator.

Gratefully,

Kim

I will keep you updated!!

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Bob: fabulous video of the returning soldier and all without words. What a fitting reminder as we prepare for our up-coming celebration of the 4th of July. Thank you.

**Pat Seitz**



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I had the pleasure of Mr McGary coming in to visit yesterday. He will be doing the Honor Flight on Oct. 6, from this area, with his grandson. He's pretty happy about it. I told him I would pass on his information and he said ok, so here it is:

William McGary  
PO Box 134  
White City NM 88268  
(575) 302-2431

I was looking for your latest newsletter to send to him, as he does not "fiddle" with computers and he comes to see me for some assistance in that area, I also send him our department's newsletter when I get them so I figured I could include yours in the mail as well.

Thank you for all you do!

To honor our national promise to our veterans, we must continue to improve services for our men and women in uniform today and provide long overdue benefits for the veterans and military retirees who have already served. [Solomon Ortiz quotes](#)

Dagmar Youngberg  
NMDVS Office - Carlsbad  
305 E. Fiesta Dr.  
(575) 885-4939

Found on the internet:

## Parachutist's First Aid Kit

Found this in an antique store about 12 years ago. IT was opened with the contents as shown here. The syrette is empty, having dried up long ago. I left everything as I found it. The previous owner had opened everything to see inside. The image shows the entire contents of the Parachutist's First Aid Kit along with the original instruction tag. It's amazing that all of that stuff was crammed into such a small space. The contents of the kit are as follows:

- Small rubberized pouch with tie strings for securing to helmet, belt or equipment straps
- Tourniquet for severe wounds where pressure dressing will not stop the bleeding
- Wound tablets, sulfadiazine to be taken for severe wounds and prevent infection
- Morphine syrette to be administered for severe pain. Person giving the morphine was to mark an "M" on the recipients forehead to alert medical personnel that morphine had previously been given
- Small "Carlisle Model" first aid dressing
- Cardboard tbe with iodine sway in glass amouple
- Instruction sheet for Morphine and tourniquet
- para\_First\_Aid



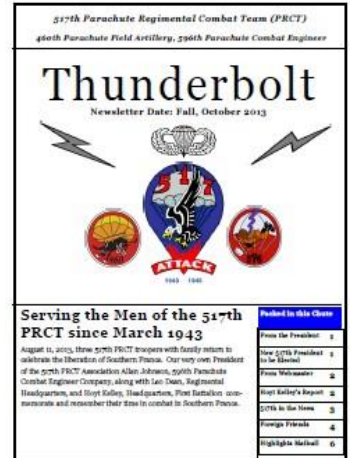


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The publisher informs me the Thunderbolts are in the mail -- Hurrrraaaayyyy!!!

In reviewing the cost to published the Thunderbolt with 264 people receiving it four times a year (quarterly) it is costing the 517th PRCT Association a little over \$3,000 per year. Joanne Barrett our recent treasurer and our new current treasurer Mimsey Kelly have informed me that the association is not receiving many dues or donations.

I am therefore asking our members (not our troopers or spouses) if the want to continue receiving the Thunderbolt to pay a \$30 annual dues or make whatever kind of donation they can. Please remember if you have a computer you can access the Thunderbolt online at the 517th website [517prct.org](http://517prct.org).



The 517th PRCT Association is committed to ensuring that all 517th troopers receives the Thunderbolt at no cost. These men have sacrificed so much for us we want to make sure they can stay in touch with their association.

So if you can please send dues or donations to:

517 PRCT Association, Inc.  
c/o Miriam Boyle Kelly  
19 Oriole Court  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Thank you so much for your continued support of the 517th PRCT Association. Our fathers wanted the 517th legacy to live forever, and I know we as sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, and friends want to do all we can to keep the legacy alive!!

**Lory Curtis**, 1st Vice President



From: <https://www.facebook.com/abmcpage>

At ABMC commemorative cemeteries around the world, our marble headstones are inspected on a regular basis. When a headstone is stained or damaged and the existing one cannot be repaired, the headstone is replaced. Currently, Sicily-Rome American Cemetery is in the process of replacing 70 headstones.





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**Subject:** Bob... A discovery at the American Cemetery in Brittany

After the trip to Normandy for the D-Day celebrations, I took a couple of extra days and visited parts of Brittany. On my list of places to visit was the American Cemetery at St James. In front of the Chapel there's a wall with names of the missing in action - soldiers and airmen. There are 8 names on each panel and there are 62 panels for a total of 496 names. I was just ambling along reading some names and noting units, branch of service, etc., and this panel (photo 0615) jumped out at me.

Maybe you know about **PVT Gruwell** and have records of his death and disappearance. If not, there may be family members of the 517 who'd like to know about this cemetery and his name among the missing in action.

*Earl Tingle*



Hi Earl, That is quite amazing that you ran across Pvt. Gruwell's MIA plaque. I only found out about this a year ago. Gruwell was KIA on August 15, 1944 but the body went missing, so he was never officially on the 517<sup>th</sup>'s KIA list.

Here is the story from a year ago: <http://517prct.org/mailcall/2161.pdf>





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70e anniversaire du débarquement de Provence - 70th anniversary of the Provence landing



See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/246786602142946/>

Hello all, following preparation of the program of commemorations of the Provence landings, we have the pleasures that the program on August 15, 1944 ceremonies (from 13 to 16, including) will be unveiled in the coming days, this will affect the region around Draguignan and parachuting areas!

Photo: Parachutist of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, a few hours before boarding the aircraft for operation Dragoon. August 14, 1944.



I found this story on the web, from a an American who was on a tour of Europe in 2009, and happened to show up in Le Muy for the August liberation events. Same time I was there with my Dad and the 517<sup>th</sup>. The tour guide, Andre, was a WW2 paratrooper, but it doesn't mention which unit. I am surprised that we ddi not meet up with Andre and friends during these events. For those who are thinking of going in August, this is a good overview and photos of the Le Muy events in 2009.

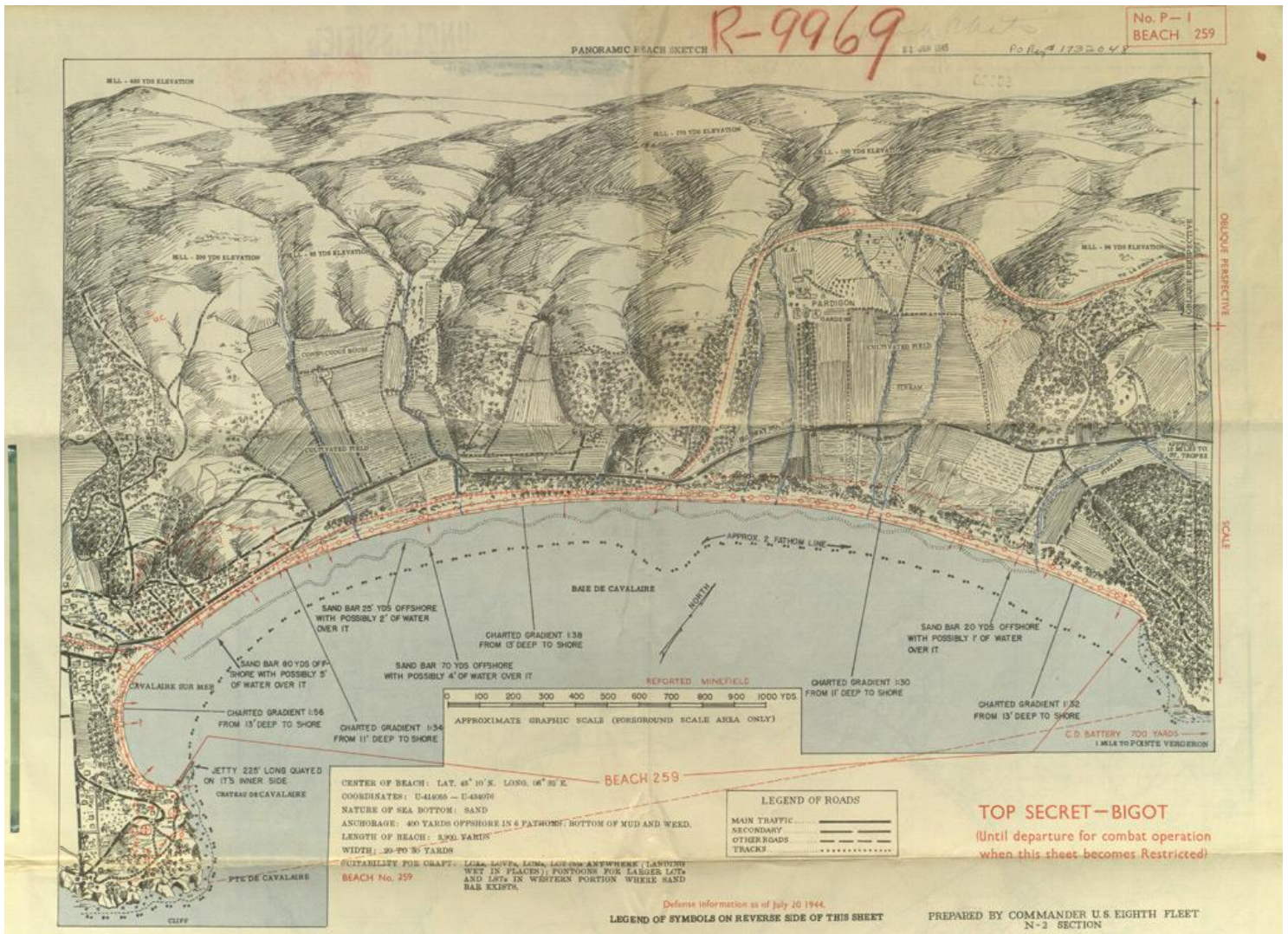
[http://chadzilla.com/site/travelog/article/le\\_muy\\_-\\_wwii\\_liberation](http://chadzilla.com/site/travelog/article/le_muy_-_wwii_liberation)





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Found this Operation Dragoon intelligence map at: <http://liberationtrilogy.com/books/guns-at-last-light/historical-photos/historical-photos-not-in-the-guns-at-last-light/>



Also this photo

“American paratroopers after jumping into southern France near Le Muy in Operation DRAGOON, Aug. 15, 1944.”

Can anyone identify what unit these paratroopers were with?



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## 70th Anniversary of the Allied Landings in the South of France, The Forgotten Campaign

<http://www.french-news-online.com/wordpress/?p=35918#axzz340ODKAsE>

As the world remembers the great sacrifices of those who perished in two appalling World Wars, Anita Rieu-Sicart draws attention to an overlooked commemoration, that of Operation Dragoon- the Allied landings in the South of France.

Var D-Day map showing the landings in the south of France (Credit: Var Village Voice)

Read more: <http://www.french-news-online.com/wordpress/?p=35918#ixzz352tSTMY8>



### Administrivia

- If you miss any MailCalls, they are all available online at <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/>
- At any time, if you want to be added or removed from the MailCall list, just let me know, or just click on the unsubscribe link on the email.
- Send any news, stories, or feedback to: [MailCall@517prct.org](mailto: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 Miriam Boyle Kelly  
19 Oriole Court  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

### Army Life, as told by PFC William B. Houston (Part 8)

Another chapter from **William Houston's** biography is on the following pages.

This chapter covers "Life in the Maritime Alps".

Next week: "Soissons"



## LIFE IN THE MARITIME ALPS

As we marched east along the French Riviera I could not help but to be amazed by the beauty of the landscape and of the perfect weather. The sky was blue, ever so clear, and temperature was comfortable for an August day. That area was not damaged by bombs or shell fire and the undamaged homes were beautiful. Each house was surrounded by a large, well kept lawn with gardens which were in full bloom. The thing that probably stood out most in my mind was the was the sculptured trees. The designs of these trees included balls, squares and circles and looked as if the designs had been slipped over the trunk and fixed in place with an open area left between each design where the trunk of the tree could be seen.

Near Grasse we went into bivouac and had a four day rest. Following the rest we moved east in pursuit of the Germans. In this area we saw more of the anti-airborne defenses of the Germans. These consisted of poles with wires strung between them and connected to artillery shells which would explode if the wire was disturbed. There was a trench system, similar to an irrigation system, with drums of gasoline located so the gas could be spread over large areas and ignited. For defense against gliders there were poles implanted upright in open fields, piles of rocks and even wrecked cars to obstruct a field and make landings both difficult and dangerous.

By September 5th we position in the mountains and living a rather dull life. We were near a mountain stream which was very shallow and had a smooth rock bottom, you might say it was an excellent bath tub, however the running water was forever cold. Late in the afternoon we decided to cook a little treat for ourselves, some corn. Somewhere we had found a pot which looked suitable for cooking corn in so we put water in the pot, added the corn and waited anxiously for the corn to cook. What followed was not normal, as the water and corn came to a boil they started to give off a black smoke, it was then that we discovered that the pot had tar in the bottom and the tar began to melt. The end result was that we did not have any corn for dinner.

It was in this position that a very unfortunate incident took place - one of our men, Merle McMorrow, had turned in for the night and was sleeping near the perimeter of his gun position when he had a dream. He dreamed that he was on guard and someone was threatening the position so, in his sleep, he picked up his gun and fired at the intruder. When someone called for a medic Merle woke up only to find that he had actually fired his gun and hit one of the C battery men. The man was fatally wounded. McMorrow stood court-martial, was found guilty, fined one dollar and given a carton of cigarettes then transferred out of the 460th Parachute Field Artillery. In such cases this was the normal procedure - the person was fined one dollar so he could not be tried for the same incident later and the cigarettes were given to offset the cost of the fine. It was also policy to transfer the person to another outfit for moral purposes of both the person and the rest of the outfit.

At the time of the accident we were in a position on a mountain trail at the end of a valley, a position which would look like a horseshoe on a map, with the field pieces at the closed end of the horseshoe. I was at an outpost at the end of one of the arms and McMorrow was at another outpost at the end of the other arm which was about a hundred yards away as the crow flies. In spite of the distance between our outposts, I, like every other man in the battery, could swear that the bullet passed only a few inches from my head. Regardless of who you talked to the feeling was the same.



We did have a scare in that position. We could hear noise from somewhere along the mountain trail and got set to meet a German patrol but it turned out to be bells around the necks of a herd of sheep with a shepherd close behind.

A week later Bud did something which deserves mention - he volunteered for K.P. Usually the sergeant "volunteered Gallwas' services for K.P." but on this occasion Bud did it on his own. More power to you, Bud!

It was in France and about at this time that we were moving by truck to a different position. We traveled along a typical French rural road which was lined with trees. The trees had been notched and explosive charges attached to the trunk so the trees could be made to fall across the road simply by detonating the charges. I was riding in a 3/4 ton weapons carrier and in the back on the left side when a tank retriever, moving in the opposite direction passed us. It was a tight squeeze and after the trucks passed I looked at my musette bag, which had been hanging on the outside of our truck. What a mess! The bag was torn and everything inside ruined. My ink bottle had been broken and the ink was covering almost everything. The chocolate bars were a total loss and chocolate had been squished into an extra magazine for my carbine. Cleaning the mess up was a major problem out in the field and much of the contents of the bag had to be thrown away.

By the nineteenth of September we were in a position overlooking Luceram, a small mountain village near the French-Italian border. Our mission was to liberate the southeast corner of France from the Germans and to prevent any Germans who were in Italy, and fleeing north, from coming back into France. This was mostly a defensive position and we had time on our hands so Jim Mohr and I decided to improve our outpost by building a new shelter and a bunker, just in case the Germans should lob a few shells in. For building material we used the wood from the cases in which the 75mm shells were shipped in and some cut stone which formed a guardrail on the road that passed through our position.

The side walls and the ends of the shelter were made of the wood from the shell crates as was our genuine soft-wood floor, while shelter halves formed the roof. One side of the shelter was dug into the side of the mountain so it was better protected than the other, but there was still a wood wall used. Both of the ends were made of wood, but one was plain while the other end included an entrance along with a stone fireplace. For the chimney we used the cardboard cases in which the individual 75mm shells were shipped. Each shell contained four bags of powder and to control the range of the shell you removed one, two or three powder bags. Before turning in each evening we would take one or two of these unused powder bags, empty the contents into our fireplace, then add a few twigs or pieces of wood. In the morning we would flip a match into the fireplace to ignite the powder which, in turn, started the wood. Within a minute the tent would be warm. Of course the chimney would burn up every time we used the fireplace and we would have to replace it, however there was plenty of material available for replacements after a night of fire missions. As the fall weather got colder we appreciated the fireplace more and more each morning.

We also discovered that the fall wind often blew through the cracks of our exposed side wall so we undertook a remodeling project. Since the wall was about two feet high and made up about half of the height of our shelter it became urgent that we plug these cracks. We used wallpaper from the shelled out barber shop in Luceram. Pin up pictures completed the interior decor.

The bunker was a short distance down the hill from our shelter. It started out as a German slit trench. We cut out a side entrance, beefed up the roof with stone and sandbags, then added a ventilation system. Inside we installed two seats for our personal comfort.

While in this position we were able to visit Nice several times and do a little shopping. Perfume and film were the main items, the film for me and the perfume to send home.

On the way into Nice we would pass a house which became known as the "peanut-brittle house" because of its tan walls with white rocks embedded in them. While in Nice we stayed at the villa of the king of Belgium, a huge villa with a small guardhouse at the main gate to the premises and a large pool just outside of the dining room windows. The pool was not a swimming pool and was surrounded by statues and a beautiful garden. The floor plan of the villa was very symmetrical, the ceilings of the rooms were high and the rooms had unusually large windows which made the rooms bright and helped to provide for better ventilation. The dining room was no exception and the large windows overlooked the outdoor pool. There were six doors to the dining room, two in the wall opposite the windows and two on each end of the room. We ate our humble 18 in 1 rations in this luxurious room. For sleeping quarters we used any room that we could find space in and we slept on the floor in our sleeping bags.

While in Nice I must admit that I did a little black marketing. A carton of cigarettes cost me fifty-five cents and I sold them for the going price of \$20 in Nice. This is where I got the money for the presents I sent home. One nice feature which I saw in French stores was a sign in a window, usually near the door, which listed the languages spoken in that store. I am not sure how helpful it would be in the States, but it was convenient in our case.

All of our sightseeing was done on our own, either by walking or by hiring a horse drawn carriage. The beach was sealed off from the rest of the city by walls built from building to building across the streets where the street started at the beach. The walls were designed to slow down any invading force and had only a few small openings. The harbor was also well defended, even to the degree that there was a turret from an American tank mounted near the water's edge. The harbor itself was dirty, filled with debris and had a film of oil floating on the surface.

On one trip to Nice I decided to get a haircut, have my handlebar moustache trimmed, then have my picture taken to send home. Things did not work out well - the barber did not speak or understand English and I had the same problem with French - so when I tried to tell the barber that I wanted the moustache trimmed and a haircut, he seemed to understand but his actions proved otherwise. He got the haircut right but when he came to the moustache it was a different story. He took one side between the fingers of one hand, stretched it out as far as it would go and then, with one swipe of his straight edge razor, he cut it off. He then stepped back and said, "Bon". It was at that point that I felt like taking his razor and working him over. However, the damage had been done, so I had my picture taken with a small, trim moustache. On one visit to Nice I was hit by a tram while walking on the sidewalk. Well, really I was hit by a passenger hanging on the outside of a streetcar as it proceeded down a very narrow street.

Since our jump on August 15th until September 20th we had been on a ration of two meals a day, but on the 20th we went back to the normal three meals.

By this time I had learned that I should have learned some French. Two young boys, about ten years old, came by our gun position one day and asked if we had seen their "shovel". Now the French word for horse is "cheval", which sounded like shovel to us, so we tried to give them a trench shovel. At that point they began to cry and ran off.

Another activity we engaged in was the gathering of, and roasting, chestnuts. To bring the chestnuts down from the tree we would throw our steel helmet up and knock a few down with each toss, these we would collect in our helmet liner. When we had enough we would transfer the chestnuts from the liner to the steel helmet and place the helmet on an

open fire until the nuts were roasted. For some reason the green chestnuts never did seem to get fully cooked and always tasted soggy.

September 24th, 1944 fell on Sunday and I went to Mass twice that morning - first to one said by father Guenette and then one in the church in Luceram. The church was one hundred and ten years old (in 1944) and, like most churches in Europe, was located on the highest hill in town. This meant a hike of about half a mile through narrow cobblestone streets, streets so narrow that at almost any point you could extend your arms and touch the walls of the buildings on both sides of the street. There was only one road through the town wide enough for a car or truck and that was at the base of the hill.

The church was a pretty little church with the conventional floor plan in the shape of a cross. The main altar was located at the top of the cross, as viewed in the floor plan, or at the front of the church. In the left arm was a monument to the French soldiers who had lost their lives in World War I. Along side of the monument was an altar and a large crucifix with an honor roll listing the names of the dead in gold on a blue background. The remainder of the church, from the arms to the main entrance, had three altars on each side.

The seating arrangement was unusual. The first ten or fifteen rows were merely chairs with kneeling benches. Behind the chairs there was an assortment of pews, all different, for about ten more rows.

The Mass was a High Mass with two priests and four altar boys. One priest celebrated the Mass and the other stood on the left, or Epistle, side of the altar and read almost all of the time during Mass. One outstanding feature was the candles - they were electric instead of wax candles. People talk during Mass in European churches and the European churches are nosier than their American counterparts. At this particular Mass the altar boys laughed and talked throughout the Mass.

It was interesting to watch two young girls, eight or nine years old, who came in after us carrying a baby. The baby was about a year old. One girl held the baby for about five minutes then passed it to the other. She held it for a few minutes then passed it on - the poor baby was passed around the church like a collection plate. Finally it ended up in the arms of the original carrier who felt the baby's diapers, then rushed out of the church. After Mass there was a Benediction and, as we were leaving the church, the Germans started to shell the town. Bud and I tried to act calm and walked down the street in as casual manner as we could but with our knees knocking together. Suddenly there was a loud WHAM! as a German shell hit nearby and shell fragments ricocheted off the building walls. We picked up a shell fragment as a souvenir took cover and when things cooled down we headed back to our foxholes.

I did receive a good supply of magazines from home but most of them were special editions for overseas servicemen and, in order to save space and weight, there was no advertising in them. It made little difference because most of the advertising during the war pointed out how the company was supporting the war effort or what their product would be like after the war. But, I did miss the advertising, it was a personal connection with home and civilian life.

There was a small resort town a mile or so up the mountain from our gun position by the name of Piera Cava so I made a few trips up to look around. There was not much to see but it was a pleasant way to spend a few free hours. Between our position and Piera Cava part of the 442nd Combat Team was in position. This was an outfit made up of men of Japanese-American descent and by the time the war had ended they had earned an usual number of citations for their valor. On several occasions I had stopped at their position to talk to some of the men.

On about the fifteenth of October I went on pass to Paris. Mention was made in letters to home, of the luxury of soft beds in hotel but no details about the city or what we did while there.

Some things I recall while writing this account in 1993 included seeing the Louve, with a burned-out German tank in front of it and a visit to Notre Dame. My first thought when I saw Notre Dame was to look for the gargoyles on the exterior which I had once in a movie. This I did and sure enough they were there. The Rose Window had been removed during the war and stored in a safe place so I missed seeing it until there on a visit in 1984. I was also impressed by Napoleon's tomb. I think the most disappointing sight was the Eiffel Tower, not because of the tower itself, but because of the fact that the army had installed a radio transmitter on the second level, therefore the entire tower was declared "Off Limits". To make matters worse, the army painted the tower an O.D. color.

There was a saying in the army, and it probably holds as true today as it did in World War II, which covers the Eiffel Tower situation rather well. It states, "If it moves salute it, if it doesn't move pick it up and if it is too big to pick up paint it". This probably prompted the army to paint the tower O.D. and now it looked like any other piece of G. I. equipment.

To me the three day pass to Paris was more than a sightseeing trip; it was a few days of freedom when I did not have to sign in and out and had hot water, a bathtub, electric lights and a soft bed to sleep on. The food was outstanding too, such as chicken and apple pie ala mode which I had one evening and a steak dinner I enjoyed with a dessert of cake with a sauce over it, at noon the following day. The ice cream was the first I had had in five months and it sure tasted good.

On October 21st I was back in Southern France and writing home by the light of the electric lights we had rigged up in our tent. My energy was directed to finding a better way to shell and roast chestnuts but without much success - the chestnuts still tasted the same.

Probably our biggest mail-call took place on October 26th when almost everyone netted eight to ten letters. I did note that only one of my letters from the States had been censored but nothing had been cut out from it. I did not hear of anything ever being censored from the mail I had written. Our own officers were supposed to act as censors of the outgoing mail from the battery but they could not read each and every letter so many went uncensored. By this time the officers only looked at those letters written by a small number of guys who had tried to slip something through when we first arrived in Europe. While I was on pass in Paris a number of magazines had arrived so I had plenty of reading material.

On the same day as the huge mail call Jim Mohr and I had to move our house across the road and about seventy-five yards up the mountain side. No sooner had we removed the roof than it began to rain. At that time we decided that we should replace the wooden ends of our house so we went into a small roadside chapel to escape the rain and build new parts.

Two days later, on October 28th, the Germans abandoned their fortifications in the Sospel Valley, including Fort St. Roch, a part of the Meginot Line. This action liberated the town of Sospel which was the last French town to be liberated from the Germans in World War II. I did see the exterior of Fort St. Roch once while in the service and then, only from a great distance. The fort was so well camouflaged that it looked like the top of a mountain rather than a fort. In 1984 I, along with others in Sospel for the fortieth anniversary reunion, I finally had a chance to see the inside of the fort. It was a firsthand chance to see how the French army once lived.



The first snowfall of the season came during the night of October 30-31, 1944. There was enough snow to spawn a snowball fight. Some of the fellows built a snow man and we had to shovel the snow from our tents to keep them from caving in.

The 468th celebrated Armistice Day of 1944 by having each howitzer fire eleven rounds into the German positions in Italy at 1100 hours, just to remind the Germans of what day it was.

In the middle of November I wrote home to recount my good fortune of being in the artillery rather than the infantry. The artillery did not move as often which gave them a chance to build more comfortable living quarters. True, when we did move we had to kiss all of our handiwork good-bye, but it was nice while it lasted and the construction had helped to pass the time.

On the nineteenth of November I was again complaining about Bud and threatening to leave him behind when I went to Mass unless he changed his ways. On that particular Sunday morning we started out on foot for the town of Luceram. When we discovered that Mass was to start in the French church in about five minutes, so we went there knowing that it would be an hour or so before our chaplain would come around. Just before the priest came out on the altar Bud got the bright idea that the balcony would be a better place to sit than the main floor. Later he told me that the reason was because the collection plate was never passed in the choir loft - it may be true but I think the real reason was the girls in the choir. This, I believe, had more than anything else to do with the move. In fact he made eyes at one girl so often during Mass that I was forced to nudge him several times. Then Bud laughed at a friendly dog that came into the main part of the church and tried to make friends with every G.I. When all the dog got was nothing for its efforts, except dirty looks it proceeded to curl up in the center aisle and take a nap.

After ninety-seven days on the line and after liberating Sospel, we had a chance for a rest but, like most of our rests, it included more training. Eighteen days later we boarded 40 G's and headed north. After three days we arrived at Soissons in northern France. The weather was cold - maybe we had been spoiled by the wonderful weather in southern France. It was here and at that time, December 9th, that we became part of the XVIII Airborne Corps, now every airborne unit in Europe was part of the XVIIIth.