



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2223

July 20, 2014

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

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MailCall News

I sure enjoyed all the history and stories in the newsletter. And thanks to Howard for his help in clarifying the data that I needed.

I enjoy very much Mr. Houston's 'chapter', and this one on England was very interesting.

I was doing some research for my book on the 'Hitler youth program' and came across this site, <http://time.com/2826794/at-d-day-commemoration-few-mourn-the-wars-losers/>

I had no idea there was a German graveyard for the German soldiers in France, but obviously they had to do something with all of the bodies. Just an interesting find when you are not aware and the comments by our soldiers.



Visitors walk among gravestones at the German Cemetery where approximately 21,000 German World War II soldiers are buried on June 5, 2014 at La Cambe, France.

Take care, and look forward to your next newsletter.

Blessings to everyone, **Anne Justice**



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Hoyt Kelley – HQ Company, 1st Battalion

Decorated WWII vet Hoyt Kelley dies at age 91

From [The Herald Journal](#), Logan, Utah



A notable Cache Valley World War II veteran has died at the age of 91. Hoyt Kelley of River Heights passed away Saturday, July 12, and will be laid to rest this weekend.

Kelley was widely recognized in 2013 when he was given a special invitation to attend a celebration in France where he was presented with the Chevalier Legion of Honor, the most prestigious military decoration in France.

Such an award is generally restricted to French nationals, but the French government can make an exception for U.S. veterans who risked their lives during World War II to fight on French territory. Kelley served for three years in the United States Army's First

Battalion of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team.

When he was a staff sergeant, he served under the infamous Cpt. Bill Boyle, gathering military intelligence. After also serving in Italy, he was one of 2,000 men to jump into France and one of only 41 who was still alive in 2013.

Kelley and his unit were in France for 94 days, which he said was longer than any other Army unit during WWII. That was quickly followed by another 90 days of battle in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium and northern France.

Kelley is also a recipient of the Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts. His unit also received a special presidential citation for heroism during the Battle of the Bulge.





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Hoyt Frank Kelley was born Jan. 21, 1923, in the small town of Thatcher, Utah. Raised in Providence, just outside of Logan, he was the middle of three boys. His father, Frank Kelley, a veteran of the Spanish American War, was the superintendent for the Providence Limestone Quarry, where much of the extended family, including Hoyt, worked. His mother, Clara, was a nurse at the local hospital. Despite the Great Depression, the Kelley family prospered and contributed greatly to the welfare of the community.



Hoyt was an outstanding athlete, participating in wrestling and football in both High School and later at Utah State University. His time as an engineering student at Utah State was cut short when the United States declared war against the Axis powers. In early 1943, during his second year in college, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was selected out of thousands of applicants for an elite Paratroops combat team, the 517th Regimental Attack Group. Serving as Staff Sergeant (S2) for the First Battalion, he was the Battalion's intelligence officer (HQ Company) and the right-hand man of Colonel "Wild Bill" Boyle. He served with distinction in a number of theaters of operation, including Italy, southern France (Operation Dragoon), Belgium (Battle of the Bulge) and Germany (Hurtgen Forest). He was the recipient of a Bronze Star, three Purple Hearts, as well as a Special Presidential Citation that was awarded to his unit for heroism in the Bulge.

After the War, he settled in California. Working in banking and finance, he worked for Pioneer Savings, rising from a starting position as a teller to become vice president of the bank. He was prominent in business and charitable endeavors, serving on the board of various nonprofit groups including the YMCA and the San Jose Symphony. For his charitable work, he was recognized as "Man of the Year" in San Jose, California. In 1962, he moved his family to Honolulu, Hawaii, accepting the position of executive vice president with American Savings & Loan. While in Hawaii, he became active politically, serving as chairman of the state Republican Party and organizing the 1968 Western States Conference. He was also active in his church, serving as stake mission president. In the late 1960s, he left banking to pursue a career in hotel and commercial real estate development, building the last high-rise hotel on the famed Waikiki shoreline.

In August of 2013 he returned to southern France at the invitation of the French government and was awarded the French Legion d' Honor, the highest military award given to non-Frenchmen. Since returning from France, he has spoken throughout the state of Utah about World War II, the gratitude of the French people and the contributions of the Greatest Generation. A widower twice, Hoyt has a tremendous posterity, including seven children, 23 grandchildren and 37 great-grandchildren. For the past 20 years, Hoyt has resided in Logan, where he and his daughter, Kathi, started a sportswear company known as Poco Loco, where Hoyt, despite his 91 years, worked six days a week as the company's chief financial officer.

Funeral services will be at noon Saturday, July 19, at the River Heights 3rd Ward Chapel - 465 N., 300 East in Providence, Utah. Friends may attend a viewing in Hoyt's honor from 6-8 p.m. Friday July 18, at Allen-Hall Mortuary, 34 E. Center St. in Logan, and prior to services from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the River Heights 3rd Ward Building. Interment will be in the Providence City Cemetery. Condolences and expressions of sympathy may be extended to the family online by visiting www.allenmortuaries.net



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From Claire Giblin:

Hoyt Kelley last year. Hoyt returned to France in August of 2013, his first visit since the war. He received the Legion of Honor and was recognized for his service in the village of Les Arcs, receiving the medal of the city. Hoyt died unexpectedly last weekend. I am sad that he cannot come this year, but am so happy that he returned last year. He was a special gentleman and had a very generous spirit. He will be sorely missed.

With **Eileen Shaw** and **Jean Michel Soldi** at 69^{ème} Anniversaire du Débarquement de Provence.



Loïc 'Jack' Jankowiak and Hoyt 2013



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I talked to **Lory Curtis** briefly earlier this week and he told me that **Hoyt Kelley** died last Saturday unexpectedly. Lory and **Mike Wells** are planning to attend the funeral today (Saturday, July 19).

I first met Hoyt at his first-ever reunion just recently. He was a lovely gentleman and had a warm heart. I was so happy that he decided last year to come to France for his very first, and as it turned out, last visit. I just loved getting to know him. He was a delight to talk to, and remembered so much. He was generous in every sense of the word. He returned to see where he'd landed with Eric and Jean Michel, and received the Legion of Honor. It was the trip of a lifetime, but I also cherish the memories of just hanging around the breakfast table on that quiet morning, when the stories and the artifacts came out. Our guys just sat there, reminiscing and sharing, as I tried to photograph just a bit and take what notes I could.

He was warmly received in Les Arcs for his combat there in that crucial battle at the train station. It was a privilege and literally gives me goose bumps - now, as I type - when people in the town realized that that trooper had literally been in their village. "Il etait vraiment ici," I told people. "He was truly here."

Bob, I hope you can pull some of the facebook photos; I was able to find one of Hoyt receiving that medal from the village of Les Arcs.

Our hearts go out to his family, and I know that many European friends have shared their condolences and photos on facebook as well. I am grateful that he made the trip last year.

All the very best to the Kelley family.

Claire Giblin





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Mike Wells and I attended **Staff Sergeant Hoyt Kelley**, Headquarters, 1st Battalion funeral today. It was very moving and a great service and tribute to Hoyt. I was asked by the Family to speak about the 517th and so I did. Then at the cemetery the Army Lieutenant in charge of the funeral detail saw that I was in uniform and asked me if I would like to present the folded flag to the family. Well, this was quite an honor. I have served on funeral details before, but never as the ranking person. This time I was given the folded flag by the Lieutenant, and I presented to Hoyt Kelley's daughter, Kathy. I knelt down and said to her. "On behalf of the President of the United States, the Secretary of the Army and a grateful nation, I present you with this folded flag that represents the service your father gave to our great nation." I then stood and saluted. I moved off to the side and a 21 gun salute was given, then taps was played. Hoyt was carried by a 1941 Cadillac Hurst. See attached pictures.

It was an honor for Mike and I to represent the 517th and to honor one of our troopers.

Lory Curtis





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S/Sgt. Hoyt Kelley, HQ Company, 1st Battalion, 517th PRCT





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More MailCall News

The narration of the first days of combat in the le Muy, la Motte and les Arcs area are well covered by this MailCall, but it ends with plans for a spoiling attack on German forces as they are preparing to attack First and Second Battalion positions and concentrating their forces in the vineyard east of Les Arcs. I have my own version of what ended the fighting in this area. Here it is:

On D plus one the Third Battalion, having been scattered/dropped twenty to twenty five miles east of our drop zone, was on its way to the drop zone. **Mel Zais** collected a contingent of our troopers and was well on his way to the drop zone and regimental Hq. Just behind his group a larger body of our troopers collected by **Lud Gibbons** and me were not far behind Mel. I was out in front of this group and learned from one of Mel's stragglers, who had been marching with a sprained ankle, that Mel and company was ahead several miles. I rode ahead on a bicycle and gave Mel a full account of the troops that were not far behind.

When Mel reached regimental Hq. the account of Tom Cross is that he strode in like a conquering hero. This was late afternoon on D plus one. Mel got an order to hit the vineyard at first light and clear the area south of the railroad tracks. This order was changed before Mel left regiment to: Do it Now.

We were successful in driving the Germans out of the vineyard and across the tracks to the south. Mel ordered an attack and only three men made it across the tracks. I was one of them. The German fire was so heavy that Lt. Freeman and several others were killed while attempting to cross. The other 2 men who were over the tracks with me were killed and I don't know how I got through it but I must have zigged when I should have zagged and zagged when I should have zigged. I got back over the tracks to my machine gun/bazooka section of Hq. 3rd and **Lud Gibbons** told me they had found a drainage underpass big enough for a man to go through. We outflanked the Germans and took a large area south of the tracks and much further west of the vineyard. Although the 3rd Bn. S-3 reported to regiment that we had taken our objective we were about a thousand yards short of it, the highway running south out of les Arcs.

This area was cleared by an H Company squad patrol, which freed 14 US prisoners and in an ambush captured a platoon of Germans on its way to set up a defense on high ground that would have taken a good attack and losses to dislodge. The details of this patrol are well covered in other messages.

My machinegun/bazooka section was then given the mission of establishing a road block on the highway to the south and we were the first to greet the 45th Division Recon. men in armored vehicles who rolled up from the beaches to the south. The significance of this meetup with the seaborne troops was that the Combat Team had successfully completed its mission which allowed the seaborne troops to land without being attacked on the beaches freeing them from delaying action in our drop zone are to head up the Rhone Valley to meet the Normandy invasion troops and liberate Paris and the rest of France.

Highest Airborne regards,

Howard Hensleigh



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RE: Provence

Hi Ben Barret

I have just been reading some of your website and in particular Provence Memories - **Howard Hensleigh** with references to Captains **McGeever** and **Plassman** and a field hospital in the village of Montauroux in The Var. I am English and have retired to Montauroux and now live in Le Prieuré, the house that was used as the field hospital. There is still neighbor a few doors along the street - rue de l'Eglise - who remembers the times very well. I have old postcards of the house and the street and would be pleased to assist in the memories in any way that I can.



Regards

Sebastian Smith

Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you very much for getting in touch with us. Amazing things happen every day regarding WWII history, and I find the contact with the owner and resident of the 517th field hospital in Montauroux high among them. The fact that the lady next door remembers what happened is also a treasure as her recollections will help us in fleshing out what happened in this story which in itself is amazing.

My first stop in my mission to bring our jump casualties back within our lines was Callian, a town I have always considered as a twin mountain town of Montauroux. A man from Callian agreed to go with my driver, Frank Longo, and me to Montauroux as he knew how to get into the town without alerting the Germans who still occupied it. We went on foot cross country and were fired on by artillery while in the open. It may have been US artillery as units of the 141st Infantry were preparing to take the town. I had talked with the commanding officer and asked him to hold all artillery and wait for another message from me before starting the attack or artillery preparation.

This man from Callian took us to the base of what seemed to me to be a wall which supported the town. We went through a door and up some narrow steps to the level of the town and walked into the clinic undetected. This way of entering the town seems to have been unknown to the Germans. Does this make any sense to you or present residents?

Another question I was never able to figure out is what relationship did **Plassman** have with the Germans who were there in numbers in the same town. I am sure he spoke German and he probably tended to some of their wounded. In any event it seemed unusual that they left town while I was there without taking any of the US casualties as POWs. It is possible that they just didn't want to be bothered in their retreat with the extra baggage. A young girl worked with **Plassman** and she may have something to add here.

One thing you can tell your neighbors is that you are in touch with the guy who saved the roofs on many of their houses. I was able to radio the CO of the troops ready for an artillery barrage and tell him the Germans had left town and he could come on it. I also asked him to bring ambulances to carry our casualties to the field hospital. He did that and how I accomplished my mission so quickly and easily



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still amazes me. I can't take credit for brilliance, but luck or Divine Providence had something to do with it. **Doc Plassman** must have worked some magic to save the casualties and himself from being taken prisoner.

I will stop here for now, but I do look forward to corresponding with you and the people of Montauraux and Callian who helped us with the casualties and in the pre-dawn of August 15.

Thanks again for getting in touch.

Howard Hensleigh

Back in 1985 Earl Price and **Charles Keen** of B Company and **Phil DiStanislao** of A Company of the 517th along with **Carson Boshier** from 504th 82nd Airborne returned to the Ardennes to retrace their steps taken 40 years earlier. Boshier was there to find the location where his brother was killed during the Battle of the Bulge. During the trip they spent some time with Erma, Arnold, and daughter Christine. After returning home Phil wrote a resume of their trip. It is on 8" X 11 1/2" sheets double spaced and is contained on 67 sheets.. I can send it and you can handle it like you did the **Bill Houston** Story.

One night there was a party for the American paratroopers put on by the Belgian people. One man coming to the party related that he met a couple of men at the bottom of the hill who said they were SS and had fought in this area. They then wanted to know what the party was about. When the Belgian man said it was for some American paratroopers they jumped in their car and took off.

Merle Mc Morrow

Initially neither the 82nd nor the 101st were Airborne. The 82nd Infantry Division was stationed at Camp Clairborne and the 101st didn't exist at the time. The 82nd was split to provide a nucleus for another division and on August 16, 1942 the 101st was activated. The two divisions were sent to Ft. Bragg for airborne training. Before leaving, George Patton (who was cavalry) gave the farewell speech and he asked them, "Thirty years from now when someone asked you what you did in the war would you rather say you were a paratrooper or would you rather say I pitched horse shit."

Our cadre for training at Camp Mackall were men from the 101st who were sent over from Ft. Bragg. They had already completed about 8 months of training including jump school. The cadre became 517th and life-long friends.

Merle Mc Morrow

Greetings, all -

I am continuing to hear about new people coming to France, albeit via social media! It looks like **Joe Bail's** family is planning to be in France next month!

If you are planning to be in France next month, or know of anyone who is, please let us know via Mail Call or email! There are lots of plans happening in Sospel, Draguinan and Belgium, and many friends await!

Thank you! **Claire G**



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I am still reading through Jean Loup's tremendous book. One of the things that I appreciate is his effort to find and tell the stories of so many men who were killed in action. He is able to retrace the events from accounts on both sides of the battles, plus local archeology and research.

One example is the story of the 596th engineers who lost their lives dismantling a mine field near Nice. Jean Loup includes the details describing the exact dangers these men faced and how they died:

Sgt Allan Goodman, of the 596th PCEC, tell us how the three men died and of the gruesome scene that ensued:

Howard Jaynes and I were battle promoted to sergeant together and given squads to lead. When I heard of Howie, Coffelt, and Mathis' death, I immediately went to the site where it happened. What I observed was unbelievable... they had been dismantling while disarming an anti-airborne asparagus. 155 mm shells were hung from wires stretched between poles. It was a very delicate job, as any disturbance would release the tension on the hang wires and the shell would explode! These shells were about five feet above the ground level, hanging from the nose attached to a detonator. The three men were clearing a path across the dry riverbed – the Var River, I believe it was – to make a passage for vehicles to cross safely. The procedure was that one would “embrace” the shell and raise it a fraction of an inch while a second would reach up and insert the safety pin in the detonator, then the third trooper knelt to help catch the shell's weight after the first man cut the hang wire. Mathis was probably the one kneeling, and he was decapitated! Howie was holding the shell I think... his upper torso was missing. Coffelt was inserting the safety pin and only his legs were left. I stayed with the remains of my buddies... alone... for several hours until the Grave Registration team arrived. Only Mathis still had dog tags. Howie was my closet personal friend.

When I think of Howie and Ernie, I always remember these pictures of them taken at the Fifth Army swimming competition in Rome in 1944. What young men! What a future they would have had. -- BB



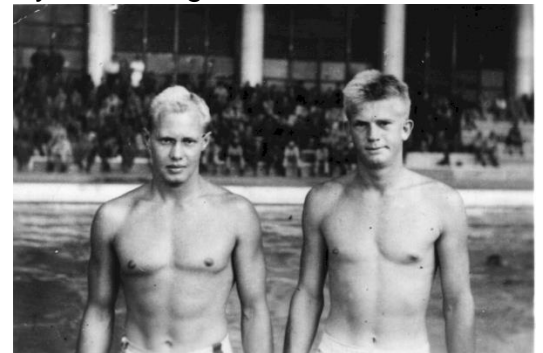
<-- Picture is of Jaynes, Coffelt, and the two fellows from the 442 at the 5th Army meet at the facility in Rome, prepared for the 1940 Olympics.

Clockwise from top, Tommy Tanaka (442nd), Ernie Coffelt (596), Hirose (442), and Howie Jaynes (596).

Diving competition was won by Jaynes. Tanaka, Hawaiian champ second. Coffelt third. Hirose fourth.

They were all divers and Howie as a freshman at Northwestern had competed in the NCAA meet in '42 and was on the way to winning the nationals when he tried a dive that no one else had ever done in competition and flubbed it.

Howie could do pushups from a hand stand and could do one from a one handed handstand! He and Ernie and Leonard Mathis were killed in the Var River Valley as recounted in *Battling Buzzards*. – **Al Goodman**



Howie Jaynes and Ernie Coffelt
at the swim meet in Rome in July 44.



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I would like to expand on **Howard Hensleigh's** 509th article in last week's mail call (2222). One of the members of that unit was **Pvt. John (Tommy) Mackall**. It has been mentioned in some unofficial records that Mackall was possibly the first paratrooper and first American foot soldier to give his life for his country in Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. Camp Mackall, where many of us got our basic training, was named for him. He was born Wellsville, Ohio and was the second oldest of five children. He quit school at age sixteen after his father was killed in an automobile accident. He was drafted into the Army on January 7, 1942. He graduated from jump school on May 16, 1942 and was then shipped to England. The Paratroop Task Force (509th Bn.) to which he was assigned consisted of 39 officers and 492 enlisted men. Their mission was to take two strategic airfields -- Tafaroui and La Sena, which posed a serious threat to the Oran-Algiers area. They were respectively ten and five miles from the invasion beaches. It was intended that the Battalion would seize and immobilize the two fields.

Normally the average distance for subsequent airborne operations was about 250 miles. This operation began at Land's End, England, 1,500 miles from the drop zone. It meant that part of the flight would have to be over neutral Spain. It was the America's first use of paratroopers for combat. The planes were unable to stay together because of cloudy and stormy weather. Little communication was maintained and most planes were blown off course at least 50 miles due to cloudy and stormy weather. Some planes landed in Spanish Morocco, some 200 miles from the objective. They refueled and took off again. Other planes landed at Sebokra d'Oran when their fuel tanks registered empty. Some planes were attacked by anti-aircraft fire and French fighter planes. Others landed at Fez in French Morocco and were taken prisoner. As three of the C-47s approached Oran, French fighter planes attacked them. Men that were in Tommy Mackall's plane set up a 30-caliber machine gun in the open door and returned fire. Mackall was wounded in the stomach. Their plane landed and the wounded were evacuated to Gibraltar. Four days later Mackall died of his wounds on November 12, 1942. He was buried in a small plot set at the side of the "Rock" for American Ground Forces. He was the first to be buried in the new Allied Cemetery. Pvt. Mackall's remains were later returned to the States and buried in East Palestine, Ohio.

After his death at age 22, his two younger brothers Jerry and Bernard were inducted into the Army. They entered the same day, March 12, 1943, and were sent overseas together. At the battle for St Lo, Bernard witnessed his brother's death on July 7, 1944 when his jeep hit a land mine. Jerry's body was sent home and is buried next to Tommy.

The dedication of Camp Mackall located near Hoffman, North Carolina was held on May 1, 1943. There weren't too many of us in the Camp at that time but we were marched out there in the Carolina heat and then stood at parade rest for an hour. A throng of 10,000 people, including the entire Mackall family witnessed the unveiling of a beautiful bronze plaque by a paratroop honor guard as a tribute to the young soldier.



Merle Mc Morrow



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I stopped at the Fort Snelling Veterans Cemetery in St. Paul recently and they now have an Airborne Circle with all the Airborne Units displayed. They were working on the 517th when I was there. A road circles it so that you can remain in the vehicle and view each unit. Flags are displayed during certain holidays.

Merle



From: <http://www.midwestallairborne.com/Pages/Airborne%20Circle.php>

Airborne Circle

Origins

The Midwest All-Airborne Alliance was founded to further the Airborne community in the Upper-Midwest. It was started by members of 101st, 82nd, Special Forces, 173rd ABN 17th, 13th, 11th, 511th, 503rd, 75th Rangers and other various airborne units.

The group had an idea to place a single monument dedicated to Airborne Units at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. That idea grew, and expanded into several monuments. The local chapters of various Airborne Unit Associations came on board to fund a monument for their Units.

Fundraising was spearheaded by SSG John K. Weber Chapter XV, 173rd Airborne Brigade (SEP) Association and enough money was raised for several other monuments.

Each Monument is a granite stone with a bronze plaque representing the Unit, accompanied by a 20 foot flagpole. August, 2002, the first ten Monuments were dedicated and donated to the Veterans Administration National Cemetery at Fort Snelling Minnesota.



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I was at the US Army Military History Institute last week and pulled a number of WW2 photos from my Father's collection. Send me your email and I will forward some interesting photos to you that can be shared. For anyone trying to decide what to do with their personal collections, the USMHI is associated with the Military Heritage Inst. They take personal artifacts and tell the story of individual soldiers. The Director told me they only had one jump jacket from an unidentified member of the 506. I can't think of a better way to remember a soldier than to let them tell their story. There were hundreds of visitors the day I was there.

On a personal note, we learned last week that Dad was being honored with the French Legion of Honor. We anticipate the ceremony will be in Jacksonville, FL in late September or early October.

Best wishes, **Wayne Cross**



Gen. Seitz, my Father and other 2nd Battalion Officers near Rome just prior to Dagoon jump.



Col. (Then LT) Lissner (F Company)
Believe this is at Toccoa



Gen. Seitz, Dad and perhaps Gen. Zais



Dad



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General Seitz addressing 2nd Battalion. Dad directly to the right.



my father pinning on jump wings



2nd Battalion Officers and General Seitz



Dad



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Co. E NCOs at time of 13th Airborne assimilation
I believe these NCOs were with E Company from the beginning.



Revere Beach Partnership Teams Up with Wounded Warrior Project for 2014 Revere Beach National Sand Sculpting Festival's "Stars and Stripes" Theme.

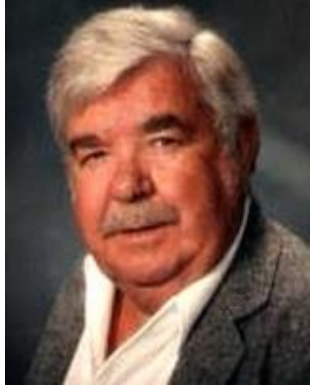
America's First Public Beach Fundraising On Behalf of Wounded Warrior Project Throughout 11th Annual National Sand Sculpting Festival, July 18 – 20, 2014





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Fred Thomas Beyer – I Company



Born: Mon., May 7, 1923
Died: Tue., Apr. 30, 2013

OGDEN – Born May 7, 1923 in Manitowoc, WI; passed away April 30, 2013 in Ogden, Utah at the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home.

The son of Otto Emil and Annabell Theresa Innes Beyer. Fred married Mary Faye Gibson who passed away in 1982. He later married Melba Faye Evans who passed away in 2001.

Fred served heroically as an Army Paratrooper with the 517th Regimental Combat Team in WWII and received two purple hearts after being wounded twice and losing his right arm in the Battle of the Bulge.

Fred loved traveling, camping, visiting old ghost towns, genealogy and his Cadillac's.

He is survived by daughters Julie (Larry) Larson, Shari (Paul) Richins, sons Jed W. (Dee) Beyer, Greg T. (Becky) Beyer, 15 grandchildren, 36 great-grandchildren, seven step-children and their spouses. He was preceded in death by his parents, both wives and his granddaughter Kevyn Delaney Beyer.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, May 4, 2013 at 11 a.m. at Lindquist's Kaysville Mortuary, 400 North Main.

Friends may visit family on Friday from 6 to 8 p.m. and Saturday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. at the mortuary.

Interment, Kaysville City Cemetery. In lieu of flowers please donate to the Wounded Warrior Project and the George E. Wahlen Veterans Home.

Dick Hevell, Tony Celli (KIA), Fred Beyer
I Company
Naples Italy 1944





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One more time for those who might not have heard this story before... This is from a MailCall in 2001:

Subj: Mail Call No. 164
Date: 10/12/2001 4:49:00 PM Eastern Daylight time
From: **Mike Spano**
To: Ben517

Ben, You asked for personal stories. Here's one I will never forget. I know that thousands of eerie events happened to lots of guys that made them believe in a guardian angel. Here's mine.

It was in Manhay. I was with I Company, Third platoon. We led the attack and were right in the middle of our own massive artillery barrage. That night we all jumped into already dug foxholes. The next morning, one of the guys in the foxhole only a few yards away asked me if I would switch foxholes with him. Can't remember his name, but he was a B.A.R. man. Without hesitation I said "sure", and made the switch. It was late morning, I believe, when a P38 lightning flew overhead. Because of its twin fuselage, it was one of the few planes I could recognize, so I jumped out of the foxhole to take care of a personal matter. Suddenly, the P38 dives and drops a 500 pounder. I dove back in the foxhole. That's when I heard that awful scream. I popped my head up just in time to see the guy with whom I had switched foxholes running with no right arm. Just shreds hung down from what remained of his shoulder. I slumped down in disbelief. If I didn't switch foxholes with him, that would be me. Neither he nor his buddy survived just that one bomb. Friendly fire did it to us again. For quite some time I suffered what is called survivor's guilt. Manhay wasn't the only rime my guardian angel was looking after me. I'll tell you about another incident in which I was shot when leading an attack as pointman at a later time. It boggles my mind. Incidentally, if the trooper who was with me in the foxhole is among our members, please write me.

From: **Fred Beyer**

I was in Manhay, and will never forget the artillery barrage the night before I lost my arm from that P38. It could be the one you are talking about. I was in a foxhole with **Cleo Browning** and believe he was killed. I do remember that **Lt. Stott** was killed that night.

I don't remember any one named Mike off hand. Refresh my memory, will you?

Sunday October 14, 2001
Fred Beyer

From **Mike Spano**

Hi, **FT Beyer**...

I was astounded to hear that you survived the P38 attack. When I saw you running, I thought you would never make it with all the blood loss. God bless you. It was either you or your buddy who switched foxholes with me prior to the attack. Do you remember? Believe me, the switch happened. Was it you or your buddy who was the B.A.R. man? Please let me hear from you. However, we are driving to Florida tomorrow to our winter home and need a week to get my PC turned on there. I can't believe it. All these years I thought you were dead. I don't think we knew each other very well, so I didn't expect you to remember me when I couldn't recall your name either. But I'll never forget the incident. I was in the foxhole next to you.

Mike Spano



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Administrivia

- If you miss any MailCalls, they are all available online at <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/>
- At any time, if you want to be added or removed from the MailCall list, just let me know, or just click on the unsubscribe link on the email.
- Send any news, stories, or feedback to: MailCall@517prct.org
- If you send me email that you do not want included in MailCall, just label it as FYEO.
- I now understand how Ben could get confused about what he already posted and what he didn't. If I miss something, please just send it again.
- Donations for any programs involving the 517th should be sent to our new Association Treasurer: Identify the purpose of any donation (Annual Donations, In Memory of... etc.) and make all checks payable to:

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 10)

Here is the final chapter from **William Houston's** biography, on the following pages.

This chapter covers "*Occupation Duty in Berlin*"

...and that's the final chapter. The entire autobiography can be found in the "Meet the Troopers" page of the 517th website: <http://517prct.org/bios.htm>

I'd like to encourage every 517th, 460th, and 596th trooper and family to make sure that their soldier's story is told and included in our Biography section. A short bio is better than none.

OCCUPATION DUTY IN BERLIN

I left England by boat, crossed the Channel and took a train to Paris. From there I flew to Berlin in a C-47 into Templehoff Airport. As we circled the airfield in preparation for landing I could not help but be impressed by the appearance of the facilities - it was laid out in a partial circle and the buildings looked like huge arms surrounding the loading area. I noted in my letter home on October fourth that the flight had taken only three hours. I also remember that the plane was equipped with litters so I climbed into one and slept most of the this time, this is probably the reason why I did not get airsick. In Berlin I rejoined the 376th P.F.A. for occupation duty and things started out on a good note - while policing-up I found a Parker pencil and a dollar bill. From then on I paid much more attention to that important task.

At Templehoff Airport, if I recall correctly, I found a Coke machine that held the bottles in a carousel and you reached them from the top, which after putting a nickel in, you could extract about a dozen bottles. Even at the P.M. in Berlin items were cheaper than at other camps so I could foresee a little extra cash left over from my pay. Also I would be back on regular pay, not to mention the back pay due me.

By the fourth of October all of the men of the 13th Airborne Division who had 88 or more points were already on their way home or discharged so my time was getting close. There was one nice thing about being in Berlin, that is that they served raisin bread in the mess hall. Not every day, of course, but often enough to make life interesting.

Our cigarettes, for which we paid \$.55 a carton, brought \$1.00 when sold to civilians. And I began to think in terms of a camera. One day I had a chance to trade a \$1.13 worth of cigarettes and candy bars for a twin lens reflex camera. It was a British made Foth Flex with a 3.5 lens and a focal plane shutter which used 128 size film. It compared favorably to a Kodak model which retailed for \$125.00. Also I started to plan to learn a little about photography, especially of developing film and printing pictures.

Guard duty was a little different in Berlin, we were on twenty-four hours, off twenty-four, on twenty-four etc. It sounds as if we had a lot of time to ourselves, but this was not the case. You were pretty well beat after a day on duty and you needed a day off to catch up on your lost sleep and bring your clothes and equipment up to the standards. While on post you wore white gloves, a white scarf made from the nylon of a parachute and white shoe laces made from shroud lines of a parachute. It was required that you carry our gun and you were always in contact to the command center by way of radio or telephone. Before we were in Berlin we found that it was very easy and cheap to send our laundry to a German woman and have her do it. The going rate was three or four cigarettes for about a week's laundry.

One of the guard posts to which I was assigned was the telephone exchange. The telephone system in Germany at that time was much more advanced than that of the United States. We were at the main exchange building in Berlin through which all long distance calls were routed using a direct dial system. The fact that Germany is so much smaller than the United States may account for the use of this system long before we had it.

Another post was at the Coco Cola bottling plant, a good post I might add because we were able to supply the entire guard shift with Cokes. On the outside of the building there

was a loading ramp from the second floor to the outside loading dock at ground level. This ramp consisted of rollers so the cases could be rolled down to the dock, but it was also possible to climb up the ramp, enter the building through an unlocked door which was about two feet square and send full cases of Coke down. On the premises there was what we called "Glass Mountain", a pile of broken Coke bottles as large any snow pile that I have ever seen in Minnesota. They must have collected broken bottles since the beginning of the war, probably to be melted down when fuel was more plentiful.

We also drew guard duty at a minor war criminal camp but that was a rather dull post. I did notice strict rules against any food or presents that were allowed to be brought into the prisoners. Food could only be brought in a given number of times per month to each prisoner but the guard at the front gate did not have a schedule so he would have to let the person take the food to the office where it would be passed on or returned. I felt sorry for the people bringing the food because the prisoners were probably getting more and better food than they were. Then there was the non-fraternizing policy in force whereby soldiers were forbidden to associate with civilians except for official reasons, this made it uncomfortable both for G.I.s and civilians.

On October the 5th Bud and I went sightseeing. We went through the Reich Chancellery and visited the room where the Axis Pact had been signed. The chancellery had received a direct hit during a bombing raid and a bomb went through the exact center of the glass dome - it could not been a more accurate hit if the bombardier had stood on the roof and released the bomb. Then we explored the Fuehererbunker with torches made from rolled up newspaper because there was no electricity. This was not very successful so we made plans to return on another day with a flashlight and a few tools. A few days later we did return, I was looking for buttons for the collection of my aunts, Bertha and Ann, but I found an even more interesting souvenir - the door handle from Hitler's bathroom. I say handle because it looks more like a locker handle than a doorknob that we would have in our home. In 1976 I presented this handle to the 82nd Airborne Museum at Fort Bragg and it is now on display in the section that deals with the 82nd's occupation of Berlin.

There is an interesting story in connection with that display. In 1982 Pat and I stopped at the museum, it was her first visit, so we started at the beginning and worked our way through each and every exhibit which was displayed in chronicle order. The 82nd was an infantry division in World War I and became an airborne division in late 1942. The museum was quiet, almost too quiet, and the visitors were respectful. On the day we went through this was the case until we got to the Berlin display, and the door knob, where we heard some people laughing and Pat heard one fellow ask, "Who in hell would bring something like that back?" Pat tapped him on the shoulder, pointed to me and said, "You are looking at him".

Another Berlin location that we visited was the Hotel Aldon on Unter Den Linden where visiting diplomats and newsmen once stayed. All that was left after the bombings and shelling was a pile of rubble but we did find the name carved in a stone which looked like it was once over the main entrance.

Other places that we saw included the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church which was almost totally destroyed, the Brandenburg Gate, only slightly damaged and Gestapo Headquarters.

While on guard duty one day I was involved in an unfortunate incident. The post was at the dividing line between the Russian and American sectors of the city and it was our duty to warn the Americans that they would be entering into Russian territory and to make sure that there were two or more G.I.s, never just one. At that time it was all right to pass

from one sector into another and, for that purpose, we carried a pass written in four languages English, French, Russian and German.

While at this post we saw a n old German man and woman, about fifty yards away, trying to load a large tree stump on to a small, hand-drawn wagon. They probably planned to use the stump for firewood. We went over to help them and while we were doing so a German civilian on a bicycle stopped at our post. He lit his cigarette from our bonfire, which was not unusual, because there was a shortage of matches. At the same time he threw a .31 cal. rifle shell into the fire and left. A few minutes later we returned and, while standing near the fire the shell exploded. At first I thought nothing of it, then I began to feel blood flowing down my legs, I had been hit. I had been hit by four fragments, two in each leg, both above and below each knee. We called for help and I was taken to an army hospital in Berlin.

At the hospital they took X-rays and removed two of the four fragments. In a letter home on about October 12th I said that I felt well but could feel the the pieces of fragments under the skin. Four days later I wrote again to tell how I was enjoying life in the hospital - there were no more shots or pills. Up until that time a nurse would come in every four hours and jab me with a needle and feed me two large and three small pills. Now I was just loafing around and missing a lot of guard duty. On that day, the 16th of October, there was a big raid at the Tiergarten, a large park in Berlin where black market operations were carried out. The British M.P.s and German civilian police staged the raid and used four tanks and a fleet of armored cars. Over two thousand suspects were rounded up, including a Russian major-general and two truckloads of Russian soldiers. Strange, but no American or British were taken in. These raids were frequent and German civilians would be forced to destroy or throw away evidence, such as candy bars or cigarettes, before they were caught. Rather than throw the candy bars away so they would eat as many as possible - I can imagine a lot of stomach aches later that night.

By then, the 16th, I was up and around and spent time getting Cokes and other goodies for those who could not get out of bed. It seems as though there was an inexhaustible supplies of goodies at the hospital just for the asking. I was released on October 22, 1945 but left the hospital with sour feeling toward the hospital. Yes, I had been treated very well and actually enjoyed my stay there, but when it came time to leave they gave me my old pants back with the holes in the legs and both legs caked with dried blood.

While I was in the hospital they brought in a G.I. who had been beat up by some Russian soldiers. It was not a pretty sight.

In the hospital I began to worry about the mail back in the battery. I was the mail orderly in headquarters battery and it was almost a full time job because so many of the men were leaving to be discharged and new replacements were coming in every day. It was a pretty mixed up affair. I had written home and asked that no more magazines be sent, not because I didn't want the reading material, but because there were still magazines coming in for men who had left and we did not forward any mail except first class. I had more than enough reading material.

Upon my return to the battery the battery commander "thanked me for the way I had conducted myself" and relieved me from guard duty outside of the barracks. Such duties satisfied me fine - the 585th Parachute Infantry had just increased the number of men on their patrols from four to six men because of fire fights during the past two nights. Also the amount of time I spent on guard duty was cut to about a third of what the other men put in.

I had salvaged the rifle shell casing which had exploded n our fire and mailed it home. To this day I still have it in a display case in my basement.

A word about the Russians; theirs was a ragged army, almost no two uniforms matched and you never could tell the individual's rank. I did see one Russian soldier buy a camera from the black market, stand in one place and "take pictures" in eight directions, then open the camera, look at the film and throw the camera away because there were no pictures. I have seen Russians who would not believe that jeeps were an American product, they firmly believed that they were built in Russia. And, after the war, I read that Russian soldiers would take water faucets and light bulbs home with them to be used in their houses even though they did not have running water or electricity.

I had never seen so much destruction as that in Berlin, I do not remember seeing a house or building that had not suffered some damage, damage that ranged all the way from broken windows to total destruction. The damage was not only caused by bombings by the British and Americans but also by Russian artillery.

By the first of November I had accumulated enough points for a discharge and on December 1st, 1945 I sent a telegram to my family to notify them that I would be boarding ship the following day.