



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2291

September 27, 2015

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

71 Years Ago in 517th History

A squad of the D Company, 517th PIR prior to be in action in Col de Braus area | September 1944



Notice the grenade launchers loaded and ready to go.

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

Quiz: Can you identify the person in the green insert picture used on FATF's Facebook pages?



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

In Memorium – Bill Brannan, A Company

Hello...I wanted to let you know that **Bill Wayland Brannan** passed away on July 16th three days after his 92 d birthday. He was a proud member of Combat team A Company. Was he the last survivor of Company A?

Marian Brannan



William W. Brannan

William W. Brannan (Bill) passed away peacefully on Thursday, July 16, 2015, at the age of 92.

Bill exemplified a life of passion coupled with humility and love for his family, friend and stranger. He believed in helping his fellow man even at a personal sacrifice. His was a life of service, which included fighting for his country as a paratrooper in the 517th Regimental Combat Team in WWII, where he jumped in Southern

France and fought in "The Bulge." He was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

Bill was also dedicated to helping the underprivileged and giving of his time and resources with different organizations. He was a man of faith and was dedicated to his family and church.

He is survived by his wife, Marian, of 64 years; seven children, Carol Sullivan (Mark), John (Holly), Ann Elias (Marc), Tom (Liesel), James (Terri), Paul (Annelisa), and Kathy Brown (Lance); 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

A rosary will be held on Friday, July 31, 2015, at 7 p.m. at Chapel by the Sea in Fort Bragg. A funeral mass will be held on Saturday, Aug. 1, at 10 a.m. at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Mendocino. A reception will immediately follow at The Woods Clubhouse in Little River, 43300 Little River Airport Road, Little River, CA.

The Price of Excellence:

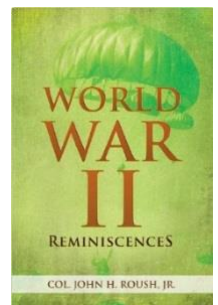
"The things that you do, that you don't have to do, and you do them with intelligence and vigor, will determine what you are long after it is too late to do anything about it."

-- Words adopted by William W. Brannan

Published in The Mendocino Beacon on July 30, 2015

I am pretty sure that we still have at least three A Company troopers left: **Chet Kochersperger, Gene J. (Zoot) Snyder, and Melvin Trenary.** Please let me know if I missed anyone else. – BB

On the following pages is a story from Bill Brannan which was included in Col John Roush's book [World War II Reminiscences](#).





31

Battle of the Bulge, Airborne Infantry

William W. Brannan, EM, AUS

Nine days before Christmas, 1944, German forces launched a massive last-ditch offensive against American and British forces in the Ardennes. At the cost of the lives of many thousands of young, brave men, the reaction demonstrated, once again, the heights to which men and women of the Allied Command could rise to force the Axis to its knees and bring the German catastrophe to an end. The following is an account of one of the actions that took place in what was to become known as the “Bulge.”

On December 23, 1944, the First Battalion of my regiment, the 517th Parachute Combat Team, had taken positions near Soy, Belgium, with the mission of stopping, if not, at least slowing that particular point of the German advance. We learned that we were facing elements of the 116th Panzer Division of the Fifty-Eighth Panzer Corps, Fifth German Army (the center army of the three German armies advancing westward), and the 560th Volksgrenadier Division. Our first contact with the enemy was late in the evening of the Twenty-third. Companies B and C, with support from tanks of the Third Armored Division, were given the assignment of meeting the 116th and 560th Divisions head-on. A Company, in which I was one of the scouts, was given the mission of relieving beleaguered American forces in Hotten, Belgium.

Unknown to us, during the night the Germans had made a sweep on our right flank and trapped A Company in Hotton. To break out, Colonel Bill Boyle, our battalion commander, decided that we would

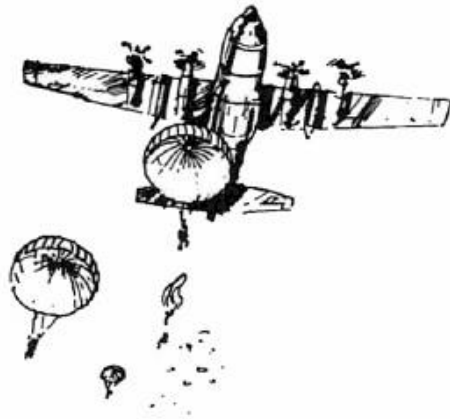


517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

World War II Reminiscences

attack from inside Hotton, and that Major Don Fraser, our battalion executive officer, would lead the attack from the outside.

Part of the plan required my squad to advance behind a line of houses, with the first squad on the street side. I was the lead scout; Don Vaughn was my backup.



I had moved about fifty yards when, to my utter astonishment, a German officer jumped to his feet and began to run straight away from me. He disappeared around a shed before I could get off a shot.

I continued to move forward until I was stopped by a wire fence and a tall tree. I was between two chicken hutches. I had knelt on one knee so that I could evaluate my position,

when two German forty-two machine guns opened fire from my left and left front. My instincts were in tune at that moment, for I was already going down when the bullets slammed into the shed to my right. We also had a problem on the other side of the wire fence. A German sniper had dug a hole deep enough to stand in, with complete frontal coverage of anything that moved. I was his primary target at the moment. My concern was for the men in my squad, so I yelled a warning to them to stay back. However, Babe Critchlow, age twenty, our squad leader, decided to check out the situation and moved up to the same position as that from which I had first drawn fire. I yelled at him to get down, which he did just as the two machine guns opened fire at him.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Battle of the Bulge, Airborne Infantry



*Douglas A. Riach (Chapter 22), Milton Anderson (Chapter 34),
John H. Roush (Chapter 39), and William W. Brannan (Chapter 31)*

I had decided that to continue our advance we would have to knock out the machine guns and then deal with the sniper. I told Critchlow to move back about twenty-five feet, where he could still hear me, so that I could give him the range to the machine guns for our platoon's mortar squads. After registering two or three test rounds, they knocked out both guns.

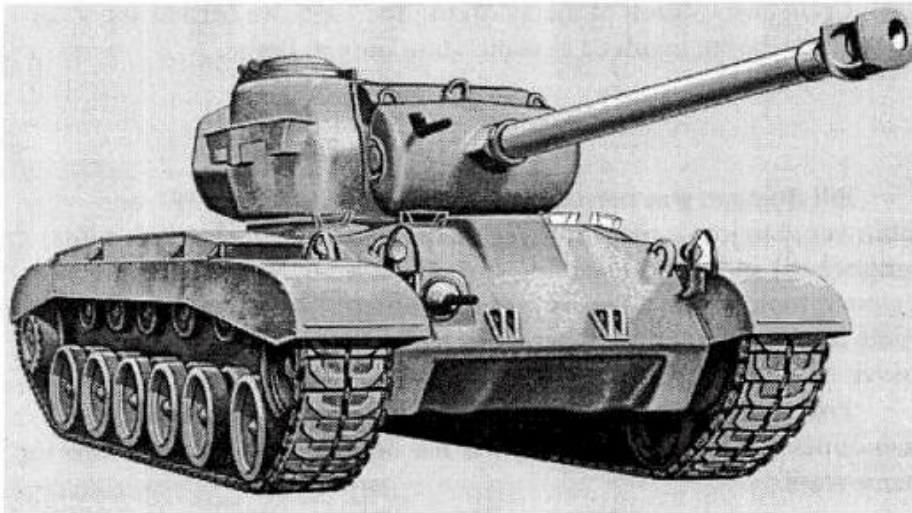
As for the sniper, it was obvious that to neutralize him, without casualties, we would have to devise an appropriate strategy. Since I could not move to my right or left without drawing fire, I decided to use a grenade. However, I had two problems: how to clear the fence to my front and how to time my throw so that the grenade would explode above his hole. There was only one way in which I could accomplish this. I would have to hold the grenade a few seconds after releasing the handle, then spring backward from a prone position in order to loft it over the tree.

Several thoughts coursed through my mind, considering how precarious my situation was. If the grenade did not clear the tree I could have become the casualty. Also, counting to three, after pulling the pin, was cutting it close. Reducing the count to two, I threw the grenade over the tree as hard as I could, but also with as much control as possible. Vaughn told me that it fell short by about ten feet.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

World War II Reminiscences



German Tiger Tank

Something else would have to be done. Major Fraser's group was meeting stiff resistance, so we had to get on with it and remove the sniper. It occurred to me that a left handed rifleman might get a clear shot from the far corner of the shed without exposing himself to return fire. I called to Critchlow to find someone who shot from the left side, and, to our surprise, we learned that Lt. Dan Cook, our platoon leader was left-handed. He took out the sniper with his carbine upon the signal of our BAR man, Buck Balleat. We cleared the rest of the houses and linked up with Major Fraser's force. Unfortunately, Critchlow was killed the next day.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention that as Major Fraser's men fought their way into Hotton, several soldiers displayed outstanding heroism. One of the men in B Company, Mel Biddle, engaged in action against a sizable German force, single-handedly destroying two German machine gun nests. Against great odds, armed with an M-1 rifle, he killed nineteen infantrymen of the 560th Volksgrenadier Division. He was causing the Germans so much distress that they mounted a counterattack which, in that case, was against one man. A following counterattack by B company facilitated his withdrawal. Subsequently he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery. Earlier, in another incredible feat, Nolan Powell, of C Company, received the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry in action when he took over leadership after their platoon leader, Lt. Harry Allingham,



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Battle of the Bulge, Airborne Infantry

was killed by attacking forces of the 560th Volksgrenadiers. There were many others that won or deserved to have won decorations, too numerous in number to mention in this space.

A few days after our engagement, the First and Third American Armies launched an offensive to cut off the Bulge, marking the end of Hitler's last gasp. Our experiences in Soy and Hotton were only a brief moment in the buildup which led to the Allied attack on January 1, a period of service of which I will always be proud to have been a part.

Upon deactivation of the 517th in June 1945, we became a part of the 82nd Airborne involved in occupation duty in Berlin.



Bill Brannan was born in San Francisco, drafted in 1943, and volunteered to join a parachute regiment that was being formed. After jump school and tactical training at Camp McCall, North Carolina, his regiment took part in an air assault in Southern France and then fought in the Battle of the Bulge, where they had substantial losses. Of his twelve man squad, six were killed in the two engagements.

Following discharge in January 1946, he completed a BA in economics at Stanford University. He has been a realtor in San Rafael for many years.



Editor's note: Several separate parachute infantry battalions and regiments were committed against the nose of the enemy thrust in the Battle of the Bulge, since the Allied front had no other reserves than the two airborne divisions and the separate parachute infantry regiments and battalions. Those small, light infantry units performed incredible feats of courage, for they were only lightly equipped and hardly suitable for combat against Panzer forces with heavy tanks. Nevertheless the brave men of the parachute infantry units accomplished a great deal, but at the same time sustained terrible losses. Of the 745 men in one battalion only 48 emerged. After the action, many of the units had to be disbanded due to losses. One of the men participating recalled it as a montage of misery: "No sleep, frozen feet, trench-foot, knee



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

World War II Reminiscences

deep snow, cold food and hallucinations.” There were a great many acts of heroism by the light infantrymen who fought in the Bulge, so numerous that it was hardly possible to list them all.



The United States Army suffered more casualties in the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest than were sustained during the entire Pacific Campaign. Historians say the Bulge was the greatest pitched battle ever fought by American armies.

The German code name for the bold attack by three armies was HERBSTNEBEL (Autumn Mist).





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

MailCall News

RE: **Chester Ogorek** – 101st or 517th

Thank you for the response and for forwarding me the other email Bob. The inconsistencies really threw me off. My grandfather has been gone for over 20 years. I really wish I had taken the time to talk to him more when he was alive but I was a kid and he was very reluctant to speak about the war. I do remember the stories he told when I could get him going and they've really stuck with me. I spoke to my mom this weekend and she said he was in the hospital for almost a year due to his injuries and he had severe PTSD during that time. I realize that things can get twisted over the years and stories can become altered but the one consistency was the 101st. That was a certainty and was always consistent. When I finally got the discharge paperwork and it said 517 I didn't understand. I started trying to figure it out and then I found the shadow box, which I hadn't seen in ages, and there it was, the 101st patch. That helped answer some of my questions. That patch doesn't lie, he was in the 101st, at least for a portion of the war. I used a magnifying glass and the rocker says "501 Parachute Inf." He also mentioned being in Italy before Normandy, I'm wondering if he somehow transferred units. I'll probably never really know. I just find it fascinating. The other things I don't understand is that it says he was injured in October. He always said it was in December. Also, if he was injured in October how did he fight in the Rhineland, which is one of the combat areas listed in the discharge paperwork. He also has three stars on his theater ribbon. Wish I knew for sure because I'd love to read the right histories. I'm a cop and I love a good case to solve. I've made progress but I'm still a bit stumped :). My grandmother is still alive. I'm going to interview her and see what she remembers. Thanks a ton!

Dave

Not sure if I already sent this, but the 501st was also part of the 101st Airborne.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/501st_Infantry_Regiment_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/501st_Infantry_Regiment_(United_States))

Most fighting in Germany was not until into 1945. And after the war ended, many troops went to Germany during occupation (or went home if they had enough points.)

That still doesn't explain only the 517th on the discharge, but I would guess that he was transferred at some point.

Bob B.

What a great picture of Leo! Enjoyed Lory's "antique" 1974 letter to the members of the 517th about the 30th reunion. Made me chuckle to see the reference to the Eurail Pass as it reminded me of the days when one could travel in Europe on \$5 a day!

Pat Seitz



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

I couldn't dance like this when I was 19 let alone now that I'm 91!!! Will some of you vets take a close look at the girls, and see if this is the same Trio that entertained us in Kissimmee year before last?

Phil McSpadden

WWII Veteran Boogies His Heart Out While Stuck At The Airport

During a layover at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, a World War II veteran passed the time and entertained passengers with a sudden display of dancing!

A group of veterans were awaiting their Honor Flight home, when three women began singing The Andrews Sisters's "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy."

Encouraged by the lyrics "he started to dance" the sprightly old man jumps out of the crowd and starts to boogie. When someone offers him a walking cane he rejects it and instead, shows off some serious dance moves. His energy and enthusiasm gets the crowd of other vets joining in on the fun!

Honor Flights provide free flights to veterans who served in WWII, Korea and Vietnam by flying them to see the war memorials in Washington, DC built in their honor. It's wonderful to see these brave veterans enjoying life in the moment after what must have been an emotional visit!



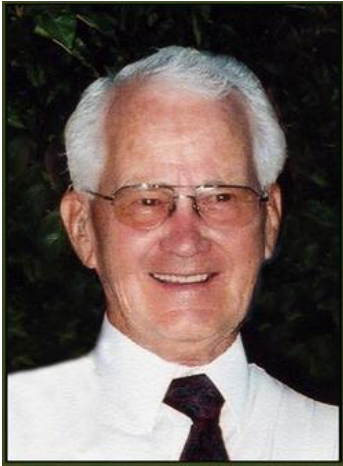
See: <http://www.reshareworthy.com/old-man-boogies-at-airport/#wUvikmuaEvxDfzD2.99>



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

In Memorium – Ernest A. Olson, B Company

We had a Thunderbolt returned to us, so I tracked this down:



Ernest A. Olson, age 87, of Watertown, SD, passed away on Wednesday, September 28, 2011 at Jenkins Living Center in Watertown. Funeral services will be at 10:30 a.m., on Monday, October 3, 2011 at the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Watertown with the Reverend Steven Bailey officiating, and Reverend Terry Drew of the First Presbyterian Church in Castlewood officiating. Music will be furnished by Bruce Reinhardt, pianist and Kathy Allwin, soloist. Interment will be in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Watertown, SD. Military honors will be conducted by Codington County Post 17 of the American Legion and Frank H. Adams Post 750 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Watertown. Pallbearers will be Abby Kucera, Michael Olson, Kelly Woldt, David Olson, Mark Olson and Daniel Olson.

Ernest Alfred Olson was born on February 22, 1924 to Alfred and Lena (Nielsen) Olson in rural Arlington, South Dakota. He was raised on the farm and attended country school near home. After he graduated from Bruce High School, **Ernie was drafted into the United States Army. He served from 1943-1946 during World War II and was proud to have served in the Airborne Unit, Company B, 517th Regiment Combat Team in Europe.** Ernie received the African-Middle Eastern Theater Ribbon, Good Conduct medal and Bronze Arrowhead.

On June 11, 1951 he married Phyllis Ching in rural Castlewood, South Dakota. They made their home in Brookings, SD where Ernie was manager for Sears. In 1967 the couple moved to Watertown. Phyllis Olson passed away on January 23, 1999.

On October 19, 2000 he married Marilyn Buckley.

Ernie was a member of the Elks Club, American Legion, Lifetime member of the VFW, and was a Veteran Hospital volunteer for VA members. He enjoyed golfing, traveling, remodeling homes he had lived in, and repairing automobiles.

He was preceded in death by his parents; his wife of 48 years, Phyllis; his second wife, Lillian; and four brothers, Roger and Orville Olson, George and James Brunick; and two sisters, Bernice Lodahl and Jeanette Ching.

Ernie is survived by his wife, Marilyn; his children, James and his wife Diane of Wyoming, MN, Gary and his wife, Cindy and Steve and his wife, Jane all of Watertown, SD, Sandra and her husband, Lenny Evangelisto of Aberdeen, SD; his stepchildren, Gene Buckley Jr. and his wife, Deb of Brookings, SD, Cindy Bass and her husband, Larry of Littleton, CO, Patty Tschetter and her husband, Joe and Paul Buckley and his wife, Joyce all of Brookings, SD, Jim Buckley of Sioux Falls, SD; one sister, Inez (James) Jacobs of Columbus, NJ; a sister-in-law, Lou Olson of Wilmar, MN; 11 grandchildren; 10 great grandchildren; and numerous step grandchildren and great grandchildren.



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



PARACHUTEREGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

Website	www.517prct.org
Send MailCall news to	MailCall@517prct.org
MailCall Archives	www.517prct.org/archives
2015 Roster (updated!)	www.517prct.org/roster.pdf
Thunderbolt (Winter 2014)	www.517prct.org/archives