



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

## MailCall No. 2300

November 29, 2015

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

## MailCall News



Hello Bob, I hope you and yours are fine since my last Email in december 2014...I need some help!!....I try to find the field where **George "Papy" JONES** was killed on January 5 1945 when he was with **Don SAUNDERS**. I think that is in the region of BERGEVAL. I must go to BERGEVAL and meet Misses **GASPAR and TARGNION** to see if they haven't informations for me. (I ll put back to them your hello...I think that should please them!)..However to help me in my searches, I need to know to which battalion of 517th the platoon of George and Don was attached on January 05th. I know that one platoon of 596 AEC was attached to every battalion of 517th which, of course, occupied different positions. As I know approximately the positions of every battalion on

January 05th, maybe, I ll can find " the big stone house filled with German" about which speaks Don in the book "Battling Buzzards". The field where George was killed is not far from that house...

I m in contact with George's daughter, Julie JONES. She knows that I've adopted, with a french friend Pascal COLLETTE, her dad's grave. I have already sent her the information on her dad. She is very happy to know all this !! ..I think it would be great If I could tell her exactly where his dad was killed..She knows nothing!!...

I would simply like to know with which battalion of the 517th were George and Don on January 05th????

Could you help me Bob? Or know you somebody who could do it? In advance, thanks a lot!

**P.S.** Oups!!...I was going to forget!!!

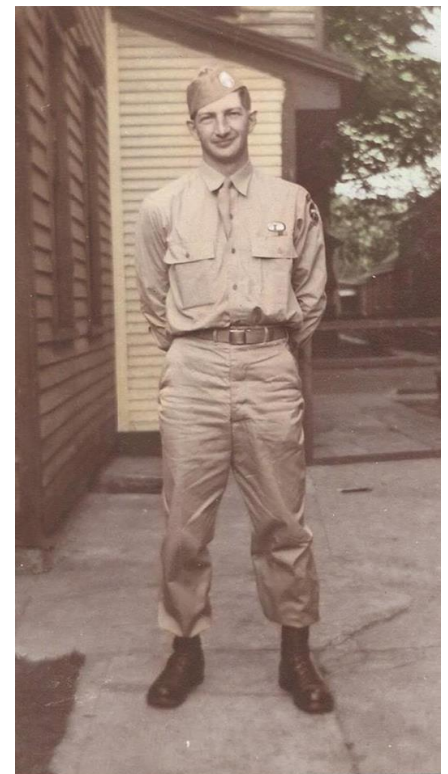
With a little of delay, I wish you a very happy Thanksgiving!!... 😊

Best,

Didier DRADON

Avenue de la Concorde 216

4100 SERAING, BELGIUM





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Another stellar Mail Call. On behalf of all of us may I echo the comment of the writer's post in this last Mail Call of how we are all so indebted to your Dad for starting Mail Call and for your very diligent, and extraordinary talent for layout and composition in safeguarding the history of the 517th.

Also the piece at the end about those who are presently defend our freedoms was inspired especially as we get ready for Thanksgiving. Thank you to all our veterans for their dedication to our country and its ideals, and to the families who suffered the loss of their love ones who gave their all for the rest of us.

## Pat Seitz and Alan Greer

PS I had never seen the picture of Uncle **John Lissner** (my godfather) and Dad that you had in the pictures posted in this email. What a treasure it was to see that one. And the letter from **George Ross** --- so moving. Thank you. Is it referring to the battle at Monte Fos in early January (near Tois Ponts).

From some brief research, there are most likely two possible battles that **Ray Bunce** might be referring to in his letter, but **Pat Seitz** may be right.

**Clark Archer** gave us this brief "[Chronicle](#)" of the 517<sup>th</sup> actions and in January, the primary offensive actions that included F Company were the Capture of Trois Ponts then Mont Fosse on Jan 3-5. But it might also have been later during the capture of Hunnange and St. Vith on January 25 – "Task Force Seitz"

517 2nd Bn	ASSIGNED THE MISSION OF LEFT ASSAULT GROUP	
517 1st Bn	MOVER FROM FERRIERES TO SUPPORT ATTACK MISSION	
551 PI Bn	ATTACHED TO THE 517 RCT FOR THIS MISSION (OPERATE ON RIGHT) NEAR BASSE-BODEAUX	
517 3rd Bn	RELIEVED IN MANHAY BY ELEMENTS OF THE 75th INFANTRY DIVISION	
517 3rd Bn	REJOINS THE COMBAT TEAM AT BASSE-BODEAUX	
3 JAN 82 AB Div	ATTACK INITIATED AT 0800 WITH 505-325-517 (504 SERVED AS RESERVE)	
517 RCT	REGIMENTAL CP MOVED TO BASSE-BODEAUX	
517 2nd Bn	CAPTURES TROIS PONTS LAUNCHES ATTACK NEAR MONT POSSE	(3)
82 AB Div	GEN. GAVIN ISSUES ORDER FOR IMMEDIATE ATTACK ON ST. JACQUES	
517 1st Bn	MOVES THROUGH THE AREA ASSIGNED TO THE 551 PIB TOWARDS ST. JACQUES	
517 2nd Bn	COMPANY F SIEZES THE AREA BEHIND FOSSE	
517 1st Bn	ATTACKS FROM A FLANK POSITION AND CAPTURES ST. JACQUES 2300	
4 JAN 517 1st Bn	CONTINUES THE ATTACK FROM ST. JACQUES TOWARDS BERGEVAL	(4)
82 AB Div	GEN. GAVIN ISSUES ORDER TO CONTINUE ATTACK MISSION TO THE SALM RIVER	
5 JAN 517 1st Bn	MOVES THROUGH BERGEVAL AND CONTINUES TO THE SOUTH	
5 JAN 517 1st Bn	ASSUMES NIGHT POSITION IN AN AREA BEING HELD BY THE GERMANS	
3rd Bn	MOVES TO ASSIST THE 1st BATTALION. CONTINUES THE ATTACK.	
551 PI Bn	MOVES TOWARDS PETITE HALLEAUX ALONG THE SALM RIVER	
551 PI Bn	CAPTURES PETITE HALLEAUX. 504 MOVES FROM RESERVE POSITION.	(5)
82 AB Div	GEN. GAVIN ISSUES ORDER FOR COMBAT TEAM TO RELIEVE 505 PIR	
517 3rd Bn	REMAINS WITH THE 504 PIR. MOVES TO VICINITY OF ABREFONTAINE.	
517 1st Bn	AND 2nd BATTALION MOVE INTO THE AREA PREVIOUSLY ASSIGNED TO THE 505 PIR	
82 AB Div	RELIEVED BY ELEMENTS OF THE 75th INFANTRY DIVISION. READY NEW ATTACK PLAN.	
517 RCT	ATTACHED TO THE 106th INFANTRY DIVISION. ASSIGNED NEW MISSION.	
11 JAN 106 In Div	HAS BEEN DECIMATED. ATTEMPTING TO REORGANIZE.	
517 RCT	ASSUMES THE MISSION PREVIOUSLY ASSIGNED TO THE 112th INFANTRY REGIMENT	

There are a couple of recaps of Task Force Seitz, but the most accurate version is most likely **Dick Seitz's** recollection as reported by **Patrick O'Donnell**:

<http://www.thedropzone.org/europe/bulge/seitz.html>



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

**COMPANY MORNING REPORT** ENDING 25 January 1945

STATION 1/2 mile North of Wallerode, Belgium  
 ORGANIZATION Co P 517th Para Inf Regt Inf

SERIAL NUMBER	NAME	GRADE	CODE
Q-1325522	Harler, Walter T.	2nd Lt	X
1510-9 Fr dy to ak in Hosp, M32			
LD, Basic status changed fr ascd to atchd unassd. 17-Jan-45			
Q-1313672	Naxon, Robert T.	2nd Lt	X
Q-1284118	Karasaky, Sidney I.	1st Lt	X
1510-9 Above 2 Officers fr dy to ak in hosp. LWA (AC). Basic status changed fr ascd to atchd unassd.			
37565485	Rosa, George L.	7745 3rd Sgt	
32406655	Murnighan, Maria	71314 1st Sgt	
32405198	Pentz, Thomas G.	7745 Pfc	
35869531	Hatterick, Milton L. Jr.	Pvt	
39457115	Johansen, Lloyd R.	Pvt	
34572733	Hewling, Jack R.	7745 Pvt	
Above 5-4 Fr dy to ak in hosp LWA (AC). Basic status changed fr ascd to atchd unassd.			

OFFICER STRENGTH	PLD O & CAPT		1ST LT		2D LT		3D LT		PLD	
	PRESE	ASST	PRESE	ASST	PRESE	ASST	PRESE	ASST	PRESE	ASST
ASSIGNED										
UNASSIGNED										
ATTACHED FR OTHER ORGN										
TOTAL										

ARMY CASUALTY & ENLISTED STRENGTH	AVIATION CADETS		PRESENT FOR DUTY		ABSENT FOR DUTY	
	PRESENT	ABSENT	PRESENT FOR DUTY	ABSENT FOR DUTY	PRESENT FOR DUTY	ABSENT FOR DUTY
ASSIGNED						
UNASSIGNED						
ATTACHED FR OTHER ORGN						
TOTAL						

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF RATIONS REQUIRED FOR DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 BESS ATTENDANCE FOR DAY OF THIS REPORT: \_\_\_\_\_

MEALS: BREAKFAST \_\_\_\_\_ DINNER \_\_\_\_\_ SUPPER \_\_\_\_\_  
 MEN AUTHORIZED TO EAT SEPARATELY: \_\_\_\_\_ MEN ATCHD ORGN FOR RATIONS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 MEN PRESENT: \_\_\_\_\_ LESS \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE \_\_\_\_\_ OF \_\_\_\_\_  
 I CERTIFY THAT THIS MORNING REPORT IS TRUE AND CORRECT IN ALL PARTICULARS AND THAT THE DATA CONTAINED HEREIN IS TRUE AND CORRECT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 U.S. ARMY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 MARCH 28, 1945

Wait, I think I found it.

In the F Company Morning reports, I found one record for **George Ross** being LWA (Battle Casualty) on January 25 1/2 mile North of Wallerode, Belgium.

Wallerode is a couple of kilometers northeast of St. Vith.

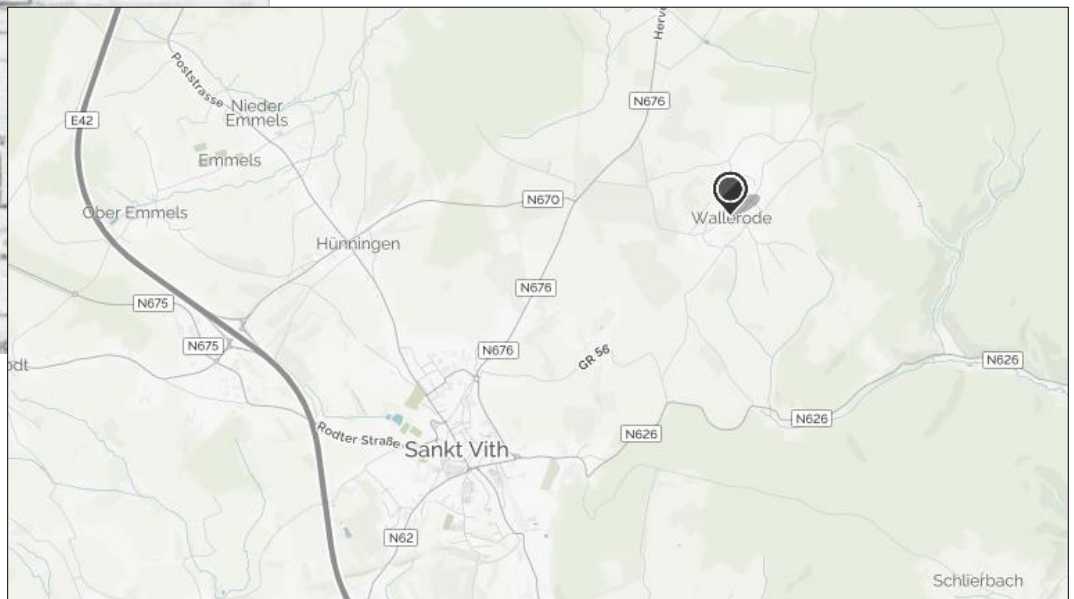
Other notes from the morning reports:

George Ross was promoted from Corporal to Sergeant on Oct 6, 1944.

Ray Bunce was promoted from PFC to Corporal on Jan 18, 1945, and to Staff Sergeant on March 10, 1945.

Thanks again to **Mike Wells** for all the work on transcribing the morning reports.

- BB





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Hi Ben [Barrett] {and Ken Ruland},

I kindly request that you mail me anything and everything you may have and be able to share on **Corporal Frank W. Hayes** (B/517), supposedly the last 517th trooper that got KIA in WWII (?). Photos, records, diaries, interviews, transcripts, and so forth -- including exact circumstances and precise location of fatal injury or instant death near Hill 400.

I'll try a few other 517s, so maybe someone may relay that to you -- just ignore it; this one email is enough. [I've got your 13 Nov. 2015 Roster]

What's with the Cpl. Frank W. Hayes Army Reserve Center?

By any chance do you know if there's anything on Frank Hayes in "Battling Buzzards" ? I'll check "Paratroopers' Odyssey" myself.

I've seen a 517 date of death as 9 Feb. 1945 (another trooper), and wonder what's up with that -- maybe early in the morning when the 508th PIR was in the process of replacing the 517th?

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While I'm on this last topic -- do you (or someone else) know exactly how the switch from the 517th to the 508th went during the night of 8-9 Feb. 1945? Were any of the 517th positions lost in the process, so that the 508th had to recapture them???

There seems to be a historical mess regarding this issue and in particular with regard to Hill 400 itself. If you read some of the 508th literature, it seems their 1st Bn. had to RE-capture Hill 400 in the early hours of 10 Feb., which A/517th had vacated in the early hours of 9 Feb. -- how is this possible? Makes no sense.

By the way, when the 517th took up positions at Bergstein on 5 Feb., Hill 400 had been in NO MAN'S LAND and under BOTH German and U.S. arty fire for some unspecified time. Thus, A/517th had to "occupy" the hill, which seems to have been like seizing without really attacking. The map from the postwar 3/517th monograph clearly shows the U.S. [13th Inf. Reg., not 113th] lines on the west side of Hill 400 at Bergstein, and the German lines on the other (east) side, with the hill itself in no man's land. A German source whose identity I forgot once stated unequivocally that the hill at that time (4 Feb.) was under arty fire from both armies -- apparently denying each other possession of the high ground, for obvious reasons.

Well, I could go on for a while... but, let's move on.

Absolutely anything you can share on these 2 topics, incl. attachments (photos, PDFs, etc.), you are more than welcome to send over.

Also, feel free to forward this to anyone you deem appropriate.

While I'm not doing a project on this, I'm curious about the Hayes story and the Hill 400 historical mess...

Finally, let me thank you cordially for your time, consideration and any assistance you may provide.



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Sincerely yours,

**Kelly Ashton**

(P.S. I'm not much of an "emailster" -- and am almost always as brief as possible -- this is a new world record for me! HA!)

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Can anyone help answer Kelly's questions? - BB

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From MailCall #887, April 29, 2005:

Entry of Apr 28, 2005 at 08:57 [EST]

Name: Ken Ruland

Unit: 1/10 Inf 4ID

E-Mail: [kruland@troopers.state.ny.us](mailto:kruland@troopers.state.ny.us)

How I found the 517th page: unknown

Comments: Gentlemen I salute each and every one of you, and I ask for your help. My daughters school has taken possession of the Cpl. Frank W Hayes Army Reserve Center and wishes to honor this great American by keeping his name alive on the school. Unfortunately we have little information on him. His family that remains are not in any condition to offer assistance so I beg for any information available on him. Thank you in advance and "All The Way"

\*\*\*\*\*

an anyone who served with "B" Co. help Ken? **Frank Hayes** was the last member of the 517<sup>th</sup> killed in action Feb. 8, 1945. --Ben

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Unfortunately, I cannot find any info about this Cpl. Frank W Hayes Army Reserve Center. There is a Fort Hayes Reserve Center in Columbus Ohio, but that is named after Rutherford B Hayes. – BB

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I do not have much info about **Cpl. Frank W. Hayes** in my records on the website, other than he was with B Company and KIA. He is buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery.

There is a brief mention in Gerald Astor's Battling Buzzards book:

Even as they departed the battlefield, having been relieved by other units, the 517<sup>th</sup> suffered final losses. Charlie Keen was on his way back up the slope to safety. "We all watched as a small ball of fire came across the Roer, traveling slowly about one hundred feet in the air before it crashed right next to the only house still standing. There was a loud explosion and the concussion from the rocket caused the entire house to collapse. We didn't know it at the time but a group from B Company's 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon was in the building. Many were injured but the one man killed was big Frank Hayes, the former heavyweight champion of the 17<sup>th</sup> AB Division. Frank had joined the outfit at Toccoa from Painted Post, New York, and was the last man from the outfit to die in battle."



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Hi,

Many years ago I posted an appeal on the Mail Call for information from veterans and/or family regarding the PRCT's time in the Bulge, and would again like to appeal to anyone who has information of ANY sort to please e-mail me ([aberry@initsys.co.uk](mailto:aberry@initsys.co.uk)) said information regarding the PRCTs activities during their time in the Battle of the Bulge. I am after varying information, from Biographies of those who fought in the Battle with the PRCT, photographs, testimony, absolutely anything! If anyone has anything they feel would be of value, no matter how small, I would be keen to hear from them.

Regards,  
Adam

**Adam Berry**



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+44 (0) 7584 414189

### *Merle's Notes on the Early History of Parachute Artillery*

As you are aware I initially started my military time with the 460th Field Artillery Bn. In October 1944 I was transferred to the 463rd Field Artillery Bn. Col. John Cooper was Battalion Commander of the 463rd and I kept in contact with him after the war. He was in poor health for many years of his later life and it eventually lead to his death in December 1999. His wife Alice returned many of the things I had sent him along with material he had compiled for his own use. This information gave me a clearer picture of where I was on certain dates and also some background of the 463rd's history prior to my joining the Unit. It also helps to clear up some of the questions I had about your father Ben and his activities in southern Italy prior to his joining the 517th at Sospel, France. I don't know if you are interested in this or not. It has, however, helped to arrange events in my mind as to where and when certain things happened. Most enlisted men had no idea at any given date where we were and what the objective was.

Parachute artillery was not being developed along with parachute infantry and it wasn't until February 24, 1942 that the War Department authorized the activation of a test battery to determine the feasibility of parachute artillery. Volunteers were accepted from the Provisional FA Brigade at Fort Bragg and in March 1942 500 men showed up at Ft. Benning for training. Since the Test Battery was to consist of 150 enlisted men and 4 officers, instructors from the 501PIR had orders to thin class down to 150 qualified paratroopers. This became Class 12B since the infantry was Class 12. Since the infantry disliked the artillery they tried their best to eliminate everyone but 143 men survived and graduated.

On April 17, 1942 4 officers and 112 enlisted men of the Parachute Test Battery became the first qualified artillery men under the command of:

2nd Lt. Joseph D. Harris - Battery Commander

Lt. Carl E. Thain - Executive Officer

Lt. Lucian B. Cox

Lt. Herbert E. Armstrong - Test Officer

The Battery's mission was to develop a method whereby an artillery battery could land with all its weapons and equipment so it could immediately go into action in support of parachute infantry. The 1,268 pound "Pack 75" was chosen as the artillery piece. It could be broken down into 9 pieces:



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Top sleigh & cradle	246 lbs. (when packed)
Bottom sleigh	260 lbs.
Front trail	260 lbs.
Rear trail	181 lbs.
Wheels	200 lbs.
Tube	264 lbs.
Breech block	188 lbs.
Aiming circle	15 lbs. (packed with bottom sleight)
Range	9,475 yards

LL Harris developed procedures to drop his battery of men, 4 pack howitzers, basic load of ammunition, defensive light machine guns, survey and communication equipment from 9 C-47 planes. Most of the hardware was fixed under the wings and bellies of the plane in padded containers that resembled coffins and in which were affixed standard Air Force cargo parachutes. The "coffins" were joined by heavy-duty ropes and dropped over landing sites.

The Test Battery then went through the 4 Stages (A,B,C and D) at Ft. Benning like we did. Each stage took a week to complete. Stage A was a toughening up week with the physical training such as the obstacle course, an hour run in the morning, an hour run again in late afternoon, with all types of exercises in between.

Stage B consisted of 4 hours of exercises in the morning. The afternoons were spent on plane procedures. Standing up and hooking the static line, checking equipment of the man in front of him, responding to the commands of the jumpmaster was done over and over. Making the proper exit from the plane was practiced. Training in landing procedures using the Landing Trainer, Mock-Up Tower, the 250 Free Fall Towers and the Wind Machine to practice collapsing the chutes had to be accomplished. Instructions on how to pack a chute were also given during this stage.

Stage D involved the 5 qualifying jumps.

On September 24, 1942 the 456th was activated at Ft. Bragg and the Test Battery became B Battery of the Battalion. The 456 FA Battalion was commanded by:

Col. Harrison B. Harden, Jr. - CO

Maj. Hugh Neal Neal - Executive Officer

1st Lt. Herbert Wicks - S3

Capt. John Cooper - Adjutant (Two years later he would become my commanding officer)

On February 12, 1943, (about the time I joined the 460 PFA Bn.) the 456th joined 82nd Airborne Division. Prior to going overseas, the artillery of the 82nd had to be given a proficiency test. Hugh Neal administered the test. All units failed. Taylor and Ridgeway were angry with Neal for flunking the division artillery and dismissed him. They ordered Capt. Cooper to retest which he did but the artillery once again failed. Taylor and Ridgeway ordered Cooper to change the grades, but he refused and was also dismissed. Prior to leaving for overseas, Neal and Cooper were reassigned to the 456th.

On April 29, 1943 the 456th left the USA aboard the Matson liner S.S. Monterey at 4:30 AM. They were now a part of the 505th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. There were approximately 5,000 troops on the ship consisting mostly men from the 82nd Division. The trip took 12 days and they disembarked at Casablanca on May 12, 1943. Ben says he went to jump school with the 515 but I wonder if he didn't mean the 505. \*

They then trained making night jumps until they loaded planes at Kairouan, Tunisia on June 24, 1943 at 2200



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hours for the invasion of Sicily. The men of the 505th witnessed the tragic "friendly fire" the 504th was exposed to by the US Navy with approximately 27 C-47 being shot down.

After Sicily was secure the 456th returned to Tunisia on August 19, 1943 to continue training by bringing in Pack 75 howitzers by gliders. This training continued until December when the 456th returned to Naples, Italy by ship. A jump school was set up not only to replace losses resulting from the fighting in Sicily but to train men who later would jump into Southern France. Men in the Free French of the Interior who would jump into France on August 15, 1944 were also trained as parachutists. Ben Barrett was part of the cadre that set up this jump school and was involved in the training of the paratroopers. His writings indicated the jump school was in Rome but I wonder if he meant Naples. Rome wasn't captured until June 5, 1944 after the breakout at Anzio.

On February 1, 1944 Batteries C and D and the designation 456th PFA were transferred to the 82nd Airborne Division which had returned earlier to England from Africa. At this point Batteries A and B were transferred to Anzio and re-designated as the 463rd Field Artillery on February 20, 1944 at a location near the Mussolini Canal, about half a mile southeast of Borgo Bainsizza. This is about the time the 460th paratroopers were pulled out of maneuvers in Tennessee to form the 517th PRCT and prepared for shipment to Anzio because of the need for replacements. The fighting by the 463rd continued around Ardena and Valmontone, Italy until June 2, 1944, two days after we had landed in Naples. We were probably sent to Naples instead of Anzio because the fighting was about over. On May 31st CO Major Neal was seriously wounded by an 88mm shell and was replaced by Major John T. Cooper who was battalion executive officer.

On June 4, 1944 the First Special Service Force and the 463rd PFA spearheaded the attack on Rome and the City fell June 5th; a day before the Normandy invasion. On June 6th the battalion returned to Albano, Italy for re-equipping and re-training. On July 15th the 463rd was trucked to Lido de Roma to begin training for the invasion of Southern France and also received 200 replacements for Batteries C and D that had been sent on July 13th. On August 14, 1944 half the Battalion (Serial 5) commanded by Cooper loaded into 29 C-47s in Grosseto and the other half (Serial 4) commanded by Major Seaton loaded into 20 C-47s at Follonica. Cooper's Serial landed near San Tropez and Seaton's Serial landed around Le Muy, Les Arcs and St. Raphael. By August 17th the men from Serial 4 and 5 and the 463rd is whole again. They continue to operate in the area around Antibes, Grasse, Castellane, Frejus and by August 30th they were in Barcelonnette, France.

It was at this location that I joined the 463rd and we moved into the Maritime Alps with the 550th Airborne to cut off German escape route into Italy. Because of snow and icy conditions, which made it difficult to resupply the Battalion using vehicles, we were relieved by a French Colonial Senegalese from Africa that were using mules. On October 22, 1944 we returned to Grasse and rejoined the First Special Service Force. We were relieved by the 602nd Field Artillery Battalion and began a long railroad trip that ended up in Mourmelon, France on December 12th.

We were to wait for the 17th Airborne who was to come over to France from England. We would join them and replace the 460th that had been pulled out of the Division 10 months earlier in Tennessee. The Germans attacked on December 16th and Col. Cooper requested permission to temporarily join the 101st. General McAuliffe suggested Cooper talk to Col Harper of the 327th Glider Infantry and he accepted. On January 30, 1945 orders were received directing the 463rd to join the 17th Airborne Division. General Maxwell Taylor interceded stating "the 463rd is firmly united with this Division and any change will result in serious loss of morale and efficiency both to the Division and to the Battalion". We were then an official part of the 101st.

**Merle McMorrow**





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I finally managed to scan in most of **Mel Trenary's** bio that he gave me at the New Orleans Reunion last summer. Here are a few pages:

### *Meet the Troopers: Mel Trenary, A Company*

## **Melvin C. "Mel" Trenary**



1944

2013

**517th RCT  
1st Battalion, Company A  
1st Platoon, 1st Squad**

Turned 18 Nov. 30th 1942. Received greetings from Uncle Sam Jan. 1943. Tried to get exempt so I could graduate. No dice! They wanted young men for military service. Reported for duty March 3rd 1943 at Camp MacArthur in San Padre, California. I had been going to Manual Arts High School at the time, in Los Angeles, California the same school that Gen. Doolittle went to.

Made friends with a guy from PolyTech High School. We were given tests, shots, physicals and the third degree. A person in front of me passed out from his shots. I grabbed him from falling flat on his face and laid him down. I was told I could join any branch of service I wanted. They stood us outside in lines. Someone over a loud speaker gave us a lecture about the paratroopers. Sounded interesting. I had been a puny kid. Having had colds, flu and pneumonia a few times. This was a way to get into good shape. Besides it was something the average person wouldn't want to get into. This made it a special branch of service. When they asked for volunteers, out of about 22 guys, 2 stepped forward. Me and the friend from PolyTech High School. Back to the doctor we went for a second physical and many more questions. Accepted, they sent us home for a couple of days with new uniforms. The uniform was terrible! It didn't fit, and I had no choice but to wear it. When I got home, I told my mom what branch I



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had joined. I think I saw her gasp a little when I said paratroops. We both weren't sure what I was getting into. After my visit home, I went to the union train station and headed for an area called Toccoa, Georgia. Being the second time on a train, it was interesting to see the country side and all the towns go by. It was amazing to see all that soot collect at the windows, then rub off onto your clothes. I met other guys heading to the same place. We were put on side rails several times to let other trains go by. When we got to Georgia I noticed the soil was red. Later on in the winter ice would squeeze up out of the soil and every step you took, it would crunch like stepping on egg shells. After we got to Toccoa, a sergeant took us to a barracks, lined us up and proceeded to give us a lecture on what to expect and what we were to do the rest of the day. Every other word was the "F" word. We couldn't help but laugh. In a few weeks, we were talking the same way. The first thing we learned was how to make our bed. If the sergeant dropped a quarter on the bed and it didn't go up in the air, your bed was not made right, and then the push-ups began. We were asked why we joined the paratroops, where we came from, how much schooling, what kind of courses, and what family we had at home. I told them that my uniform didn't fit very well. We were told that we won't be going out of the camp for some time, and by that time we would have new uniforms and shoes.

They had us cleaning the barracks and then took us to a 34ft. high platform tower, put harnesses on us and told us how to jump and then said "jump". We would glide down a cable into a sawdust pit. They showed us how to tumble forward, backwards and sideways without breaking our legs from about 20 ft. up, and we did push-ups the whole time. We had to do them every morning before breakfast and run a couple of miles rain or shine. We would run up Mt. Currahee and back. I think it was a total of 6 miles. We had to go to obstacle courses, then push-ups. We were finally given rifles, machine guns, carbines, mortars and 45's. We were instructed how to field strip and clean them, and then how to shoot them. All of us learned how to shoot every weapon. We also learned how to handle and throw grenades.

We went on 5 mile runs, sometimes with full equipment. If you stopped, you felt like passing out or close to it.

One day we went to the firing range, and we stayed all morning. We went to the mess hall for lunch, and after lunch we went back to the firing range. Some guys still with ham sandwiches in their hands on the way back. Soon guys started falling out and vomiting on the side of the road. By the time we got to the range there was only a handful of us left. I was firing a few rounds and then it hit me, I hit the nearest ditch! We all ended up in the hospital. It turned out to be food poisoning. The ham had been left out overnight in aluminum pans. The nurses gave us Coca-Cola on ice to get over it.

One evening after the show I saw a lieutenant checking garbage cans, and he came across a whole pork chop. He took one bite and told the cook to finish it. I guess one of the GI's didn't like it for some reason. At breakfast one morning they had scrambled eggs with little chick's legs laying in it.

When they updated our shots, they had a needle bent in half lying on the table. It made you squirm a little just looking at it.

I can't complain about the food while training. It was great! Growing up in the depression, we were on county relief as my mother was raising my sister and me by herself. It wasn't easy for her. My dad wasn't much help. They had separated when I was about 5 years old. We went hungry off and on living in the city.

All of us qualified on the guns and mortars one way or another. I made expert on the machine gun, carbine and rifle. **Kenneth Anderson** did well on the machine gun, so they made him an assistant



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machine gunner. We called him "Pop Anderson", as he was 25 years old. Most of us were 18 or 19 years old. He had been a taxi driver in Denver, Colorado. He was the other half of my pup tent from then on.

One day after a 6 mile run up and down Mt. Currahee, we were told we had an inspection in half an hour. Pop Anderson got a call that his wife was at the gate and wanted him for something. I cleaned the machine gun, his and my rifle, but didn't get my carbine cleaned. The Lt. doing the inspection threw my carbine into a ditch of sand, and told me no pass for the weekend. I told Pop Anderson from here on out I refuse to clean his rifle, no matter what. I think during our basic training I had KP twice and latrine duty once. We finally finished basic training. We went by train to Fort Benning, Georgia. That's where jump training begins.

They put us in parachute harnesses and showed us how to land and tumble. We had to learn to rig our chutes as well. We jumped from mock airplanes, and in between we did push-ups, "lots of them". We had already been issued our boots and jump suits. It was important for us to shine our boots. We broke them in by wearing them in the shower and putting saddle soap on them, wearing them on runs and field exercise, then polishing the hell out of them. Everyone had their favorite polish and ways of polishing them. We were located in barracks called The Frying Pan area. They had 250 ft. towers. We got in a parachute harness below a parachute, then pulled up to the top and released to guide ourselves to the ground as best we could. I always came towards the ground front ways. The last minute I would turn around as I could tumble backward or to the side better.

On one of the tower jumps I was to be the first. The wind was blowing hard that day. I got to the top and then released, the wind grabbed me. When I got to the ground I couldn't tumble as the parachute had me horizontal and I hit hard. Several guys ran out to help me. We didn't jump anymore that day. I had a bad neck for a few days.

One day while we were at Fort Benning, some of the guys had cornered a flying squirrel. It jumped and glided a long way away from the tree. It was the first time I had seen one. They also found 3 baby raccoons. I put my gloves on and made a harness out of rope, and proceeded to make friends with one. He fought me at first. I gave him some food and he got real friendly. He turned out to be the 1st platoon mascot for a while. We could not house break him. It didn't matter to him where he shit. He was very playful. If you scratched his tummy he would use his hind legs like a cat and act like he was going to bite you but wouldn't. He slept in my helmet on the train going back to Mackall from Ft. Benning. He would also grab your fingers like a baby.

We were finally ready to qualify for our 5 jumps. We had to pack our own chutes for the first five jumps so we were darn sure they were packed right. We went out to the airport and had help to put on our chutes and harness. Then we were told what to expect. They stressed the fact that the harness is to be very tight and snug. I understand our outfit (517th RCT) was the 1st in training to jump with helmets on. We had shin straps to keep the helmets on. All other before us had used the old style football type head covers.

We stood up and walked to the C-47 airplane. I think it held around 24 persons plus the instructors and pilots. I was the last person to get on the plane and sat right next to the door. As we got airborne I was fascinated by the fact that this big machine could fly up in the air. It was the first time for a lot of us to fly. Someone yelled "hey Trenary" you're going to be the first one to jump out. I looked at the Lt. and he said yes! We were trained right, so when the green light went on I stood up at the door, threw the static down past the door, looked at the horizon with hands at the door side and when the instructor touched my leg



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I went out. I closed my eyes and felt the chute open. It's quite a jerk on your body but it's a thrill. You drop about 70 ft. before your chute opens. We have what they call a static line which stays hooked to a line in the plane so that your chute opens automatically as you go out the door. As I landed I tumbled and just missed some cactus. I gathered up my chute, and a jeep came by and took us to the rig building where we packed our chute for the next day.

The next jump I decided to leave my harness a little loose as it hurt my family jewels! When my chute opened, the harness being a little loose caused my breast strap to hit my chin knocking me out. I woke up looking at the inside of my helmet. I pushed my helmet back on my head and still had time to tumble. I learned my lesson! It could have been worse! On our last qualifying jump (the 5th), one of the guys put on jump wings right after he landed. You could buy them at the PX. Later on they had a ceremony and pinned on our jump wings and congratulated us. Eventually we got on a train and headed for Camp Mackall, N.C. for more training, and then we went to Fort Bragg N.C. for additional training. A lot of it was maneuvers with other outfits so as to handle ourselves in battle. When we did night jumps or maneuvers, I was fascinated to see the rotted wood glowing at night when we walked through it. At this time we were part of the 17th division and wore the Eagle Claw as our shoulder patch.

Well I must say I got into the paratroops because I wanted to build myself up. They did that alright. I could lay my hands on the ground in front of me, then lift my feet above my head and stand on my hands all in one motion. We had one guy we called Tarzan. He could do push-ups on one hand with a person on his back. It was amazing! He washed out because they wouldn't let him stay at Ft. Benning as an instructor. The friend that came with me from PotyTech quit and went into the Air Force. I remember him coming over and saying goodbye.

One jump, I went out the door and came back in. I forgot to let go of the static line. Another jump I was heading for a big dead tree. I pulled the risers to avoid going in that direction, however I was in a pocket among the trees and went straight down. My knee hit my nose causing a nose bleed; also I was in a briar patch. No matter which way I moved, I would get stickers in me, so I decided to hell with it and pushed my way out. It took about a week to get all of the stickers out of me! Another jump, the plane hit some strong air currents, surged upward causing me to go down to my knees, so I just crawled out the door on my hands and knees. Another time we had a night jump, flew to Florida and back. We were supposed to jump at a certain place, but the pilot got lost. We began looking out the door for place to jump, when one of the guys got his spare chute caught on something and it opened in his lap. That was the only time we had to land with an airplane instead of jumping from one. Later on we found that we could ride with the airplane crew as they got their hours in, so we could get used to flying.

A few days before our furlough one of the guys lost his wallet in the barracks. The sergeants along with the platoon Lt. searched all of us as we went out the door. After we all ended up outside and it wasn't found, the Lt. said now let's search each other. They ended up finding it in the pants leg of one of the sergeants. They took his stripes and put him in another platoon in another company. The time was getting close for us to go on furlough. They gave us passes for only 15 days. Going to California didn't give us much time to be home and see everyone. It takes about 4 days by train one-way. So a group of us from California decided we would meet at the Palladium in Hollywood on the last day of our furlough. The next morning we would meet at the Union Train Station in L.A. and go back together. That way the MP's would leave us alone. I had taken several cartons of cigarettes home and gave them to relatives and my mother. In return, they let me use my cousin's "Model A" Ford convertible. Relatives gave me gas stamps too. I had a ball! Met the guys at the Palladium the last night. Bob Crosby was playing at the time. We met at the Union Train Station next morning. Going back to the camp, we decided to get off the train at New Orleans. Got our boots shined by two little talented black boys who danced and did the shining to the music. They were great! Later we jumped off the train at Montgomery, Alabama as we



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had seen a carnival. We were AWOL anyway. We also got off at Atlanta, Georgia. For some reason I got separated from the rest of the group and went back to the train station. MP's stopped me and took me to the brig. They gave me a pass to go the rest of the way to camp. When I got there I got an ass chewing I'll never forget, and was restricted to camp for two weeks. The other guys didn't have a problem when they came in. The raccoon was let loose in the wild after I left on furlough.

We went on maneuvers in Tennessee for a week at one point we had to bivouac in a field. Anderson and I found an old bed spring and got it in our pup tent. We fixed our bed on it. While fixing it, lightning struck two trees side by side about 30 yards away. Steam came up from the base of the trees. The next morning a stream was running thru our tent. The springs kept us from being washed out. The weather was rain, rain, and more rain. One morning Anderson and I decided to ask a nearby resident if they could make some breakfast for us. We were willing to pay for it. Keep in mind we were way out in the sticks. The place looked like a log cabin that had been there a long time. A little boy was out in front smoking a cigarette. His teeth were all brown. His folks were still in bed, but they agreed to fix breakfast. They could use the money! They put wood in the stove and we had thick sliced bacon, eggs and biscuits. Boy what a treat We had been on K ration for some time. We got back in time to leave with our outfit. I remember walking in a creek with buildings on both sides. I assume it was their main street. The rain had made a river out of it. It was all rock like a river bed. Another place we walked thru a cemetery all grown up with weeds. It had old grave site markers. Going thru the under-brush I looked up to see a green snake about 12" long hanging from a tree. I grabbed it and passed it around. We also went thru swamps with snakes going right beside us. They finally put us on trucks for the final trip back to camp. Our truck got lost (I think on purpose) we ended up at a little country store. We bought just about everything he had to eat. Behind the store was a farmhouse and stable with a mule and a couple of horses. One guy volunteered to break in one of the horses. It was fun watching him getting thrown several times. We finally found our way to the camp. I'm sure the driver got an ass chewing.

They sent us to Newport News, Virginia. All three BTNS, plus a group of WACS were on the Santa Rosa. The 460th (artillery) and 596th (engineers) were on the USS Chrisobal. Both were liberty ships.

The WACS did all of our paperwork and made some guys happy. Two guys died on the trip from alcohol poisoning. Something they made themselves. We were in a convoy with many ships. We were told we were the first convoy to make it without being hit by a submarine. I got officers mess KP duty the first day. The food was good, so I volunteered to stay for the whole trip.

We arrived in Naples May 31st 1944. We docked in the harbor among sunken ships and walked across them to get to shore. We were placed in the Mussolini fair grounds. Our group got under the high floor on one of the buildings. Everyone dug out their stations. The Chinese cook had given me a sack of sandwiches. I brought it out looking at the guys near me. I couldn't help but laugh. I shared and got a half sandwich anyway. After lunch we went to a crater. Some guys had cartons of cigarettes strapped to their musette bag. Some Italian kids ran up and grabbed them. All of the BTLNS fit in that crater, pup tents and all. There were lights up at the rim of the crater at night. Some of us hiked up there and found a bar. We got drunk and tumbled back down to our pup tents.

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For the rest of Mel's story, visit his webpage at: [http://517prct.org/bios/mel\\_trenary/mel\\_trenary.htm](http://517prct.org/bios/mel_trenary/mel_trenary.htm)



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### Book Review – Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Sunday, November 21-22, 2015

## The Most Savage Battle in the West



Dogged Defenders: U.S. soldiers of the 7th Armored Division in the heavily contested town of St. Vith, Belgium  
PHOTO: ULLSTEIN BILD/GRANGER COLLECTION

### ARDENNES 1944: THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

By Antony Beevor  
*Viking, 451 pages, \$35*

The counterattack in December 1944 against the approaching Allied armies in Belgium was Germany's last fling of World War II. Given the code-name Herbstnebel ("Autumn Mist," though it might more correctly and appropriately be rendered as "Autumn Fog"),

it caught the British and Americans by complete surprise, though it would not have surprised the Red Army, which had learned to its cost the capacity of the German armed forces to suddenly recoil after apparent defeat and inflict a damaging riposte. The operation destroyed the illusion that the war would be over by Christmas, which had seemed a real possibility following the victorious race across France to the German borders in July and August. It was also the most savage battle



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fought in the west.

This is the subject matter of Antony Beevor's latest battle history. After Stalingrad, Berlin and D-Day, the final great operation in the west was a natural choice for him. "Ardennes 1944" is his trademark close narrative of the fighting interwoven with the insights and recollections of those who took part. The confused violence and awful human cost are vividly brought to life—indeed "fog" was an apt choice for an operation launched in foul weather and one in which snow, mud and freezing temperatures turned the battlefield into something reminiscent of the harsh Eastern front. The veteran German forces transferred from the east for the operation would have been used to fighting in such gloom and cold, which their opponents were not.

The Battle of the Bulge, as it is known in the West, came at an awkward time for the American, British and Canadian forces. Home populations were impatient for victory after the great successes of the summer, while Londoners desperately wanted an end to the rain of V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets. There were tensions between the American forces under Omar Bradley and George Patton, poised to enter Germany at the south of the front, and the British 21st Army Group under Bernard Montgomery, which was in the north threatening Germany's Ruhr-Rhineland industrial zone. Supreme Commander Dwight Eisenhower in his headquarters in Paris knew he had a difficult time ahead as he tried to coordinate overconfident and self-important subordinates, all of whom wanted to deliver the knockout blow.

Mr. Beevor is candid about the difference of opinions—Patton was bent on crossing the Rhine ahead of the others, Montgomery sure that he had a better grasp of battlefield strategy and ought to be in overall charge—but he does not pass judgment. Indeed, it is evident from this account that everyone made mistakes. Any thought of the great Soviet Vistula-Oder offensive that began in January 1945 encourages the idea, which must have occurred to Mr. Beevor as he worked, that Zhukov and Konev would have found the assault into Germany from the west less of a challenge.

There is, in truth, little point in taking sides. All the generals made the mistake of underrating the German forces who turned to face them in defense of their fatherland. The failure to get across the Rhine at Arnhem in September 1944 should have been a warning. There had been major intelligence lapses and a disastrous outcome. It was no different in December. At Allied headquarters, there was a complete ignorance that a large German force was concentrating to strike a blow at the junction between the Americans and the British—and perhaps, if fortune smiled on the enterprise, even reach the port of Antwerp. There was little effective air reconnaissance (at a time when Allied air forces dominated the skies), and the few slivers of information available were ignored.

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**It is a profound irony that the German breakthrough in late 1944 came in the site of the breakthrough in 1940.**

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As so often with intelligence disasters, it was a lack of imagination that doomed the Allies.



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The inability to conceive that the German forces in western Germany had any real reserves left for a major campaign was infectious. Even when the operation started, on Dec. 16, 1944, it took several days before it became clear that the Germans were undertaking a major campaign. There is a profound irony that the area chosen for the attack—a weakly held part of the front in the forested Ardennes—was precisely the site of the successful German attack in May 1940, when French generals had also played down the prospect that any serious assault could be mounted across such difficult terrain.

Once Mr. Beevor gets into the battle itself, about a third of the way through the book, the narrative takes over. In a whole series of small engagements, often village by village or foxhole by foxhole, the German units drove forward. The harsh weather was critical because clear skies would have exposed them to relentless air strikes. As it was, most lines of attack were held up by small pockets of American soldiers, some having been sent to “rest” in a quiet part of the front, who found the courage to take on German armor despite their isolated and precarious positions. The Germans also found it more difficult to maneuver their vehicles and armor in winter than they had in spring 1940, and logjams developed. The battle was messy in every sense, and problems of communication on both sides made the actual shape of the conflict difficult for the generals to work out.

Eventually the Allied disaster became clear. Shuttle diplomacy between Bradley, Patton, Montgomery and Eisenhower reached a compromise: Patton driving north against the bulge and Montgomery driving south. With all their own holdups and confusion, the

Germans made it easier for the Allies to contain the salient and then to drive it slowly back. Field Marshal Walter Model, the most spirited of Hitler’s remaining commanders, had given the operation a 10% chance of success. A bit of luck, Allied panic (like the French panic of 1940), and more mass surrenders like that of the unfortunate 8,000 of the U.S. 106th Division (two of whose three regiments were encircled at Schnee Eifel during the initial German assault) might have brought some dividends. But Model was right, and the odds were always against German victory, though the cost to the Allied armies in casualties and equipment was prodigious. On the German side, Autumn Mist was seen as a last chance; for many young soldiers it was a way of making their mark in defense of the homeland, a do-or-die rite of passage.

Running through the whole of Mr. Beevor’s account is a level of battlefield savagery that defies belief that men could endure it. The German troops, and the Waffen-SS in particular, honed on the pitiless struggle in the east, routinely committed atrocities. Little provision was made for taking prisoners, and the more hardened German troops simply shot any soldier or civilian who got in the way. Mr. Beevor shows that giving no quarter was practiced on both sides once it was clear that those were the terms in which the struggle was to be fought. German prisoners were killed, sometimes for revenge, sometimes, again, because holding them was too difficult in conditions of mobile combat, though thousands also ended up in POW camps. Waffen-SS prisoners, however, were rare, and they could have no ground for complaint. Conditions of combat were completely debilitating, encouraging extreme





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behavior toward the enemy. Medical services at the very front were primitive, and the wounds inflicted by modern weaponry against unprotected bodies appalling.

American surgeons found that it was easier to operate on injured Germans because their meager diet had left little fat on the bones.

Anyone reading Mr. Beevor's searing account of the Bulge must wonder again what made young Europeans and Americans capable of doing this to one another. Ideology seems to have played little part. Loyalty to the unit was more likely to keep men fighting—coupled

with effective leadership and a visceral desire to survive. But once in the heart of the conflict, there seems to have been a raw animal energy unleashed that kept soldiers going until they died or collapsed. Reading these terrible accounts is a salutary reminder of that thin veneer detected by Freud between the civilized and the primitive in each of us. "Ardenne 1944" ought to prompt some careful reflection on our modern age.

—Mr. Overy's most recent book is "The Bombers and the Bombed: The Allied Air War Over Europe."

From: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-most-savage-battle-in-the-west-1448045201>

### *Administrivia*

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- 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:

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