517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2307

January 17, 2016

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

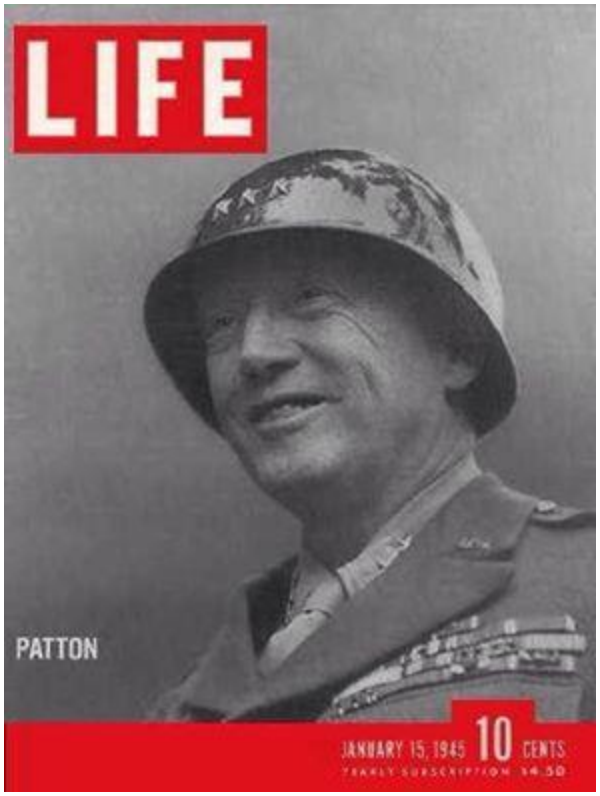
Battle of the Bulge 1944-1945

pictures from: https://www.facebook.com/World-War-II-1584273495176153

517th PIR 3rd Battalion CP (left) and Aid Station (right). Manhay, 11 January 1945.

American soldiers help an old Belgian woman, who refused to evacuate the town, Manhay, during the fighting

American troops advance on St. Vith, Belgium in the Ardennes, January 1945, Battle of the Bulge



Life Magazine, General Patton, January 15 1945.

American Soldiers ‘dating’ a snow-woman and offering her cigarettes and coca-cola,January 14,1945

MallCall News

RE: Photos for **Lt. David Taylor** bio

Hi and Happy New Year. I have some photos that belonged to my mom to include in my Uncle's bio. The photo of him about to jump from the plane doesn't look to me like Uncle David, but it was included in a set of him, so I'm assuming that it's him. If anyone recognizes the man in the photo and can identify him if it's not my Uncle David, I would appreciate it. Also, I would appreciate any insight that anyone can offer in terms of what rank he was when the formal photo was taken and where the photo with palm trees was taken (Southern France?)

Thanks.

Ellen O'Donnell

Hello
have you any info on **Dale Norton** of Minnesota, believe he was in the 517th/460th FA in WWII, he had passed away some years ago
thank you

John Grindahl <jgrindahl@gmail.com>

MailCall #2306: Another absolutely incredible issue! Thanks Bob!

John Krumb

Thank you so much for sharing this with me. It's a great newsletter. I am Jeanne's granddaughter. I've been traveling for some time so I made the trip alone. Although many members of my family have also made this trip. Including my grandma with Papa back in 2000.

Amy Phillips

Gary Davis' great-granddaughter

When we came back to Nice from Fort Babonnet on the French-Italian border, I was amazed that the French were already jack hammering the pill boxes & were going to have a fashion show. The beach had several pill boxes on it that had to be removed & barbed wire. Also we stayed in one of the Hotels. I had guard duty all the time we were there, but it was better than fighting. Later we went to the battle of the bulge. I won't forget that either. Every time someone sees my cap that says WWII they say that there isn't many of you left is there. I have to agree. All the guys I was close to are gone now. I miss them all including my wife.

Mel Trenary

This was a very full Mail Call. Many thank-you's to **Amy Phillips** for her wonderful pictures and to our French friend for his care, affection and support that enabled her to take them. Amy's pictures give those who have not had a chance to walk the battle fields in which the 517th fought in the South of France.

Likewise, thank you to our Belgian friends for their dedication, care, love and support in preserving the memory of the events of the Bulge and the monuments to those who made heroic contributions in that Battle. The pictures from the fighting during the Bulge are particularly poignant given the present time of the year. Where did you get the picture of Marlene?

Finally, Merle, thank you for sharing the letter from Gen. Gavin's daughter Barbara. And thank you Bob for the information on the history of the jump boots.

A blessed and Happy New Year to all

Pat Seitz

Here's one more of Marlene Dietrich from https://www.facebook.com/1584273495176153/photos/a.1584608218240871.1073741829.1584273495176153/1662094640727371/?type=3&theater

Marlene Dietrich, on the edge of the Ardennes Forest in Belgium, December, 1944

Palm Springs Reunion

Hello Bob,

Hope this finds you and your well. Happy New Year!!!

I spoke to Claire today. She told me the website had the Palm Springs reunion listed as being held in January.

Could you please post frequently that the dates are **March 7-11, 2016**

Held at Anahata Hot Springs, we take over the entire resort. It is very nice, all rooms open to pool side and hospitality room.

Cost will be low as usual, hard to predict until we know numbers, I would say under 250.00 for the your room the whole week, food usually 150.00 for all meals at the resort, excluding when we go out to eat.

You can put my name and number as a contact
Karen Wallace
541-948-2486
Please let me know you got this email.

Thanks for all you do!

Karen Wallace

I receive the 517th MailCall and I noticed awhile back that there was a list of current 517th troopers in the newsletter, but my Grandpa Joe wasn't on the list. I was wondering if we could get him added to it? His name is **Ignatius Joe Bail** and he was in the 460th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, Battery A. Thank you!

Jennifer Walker

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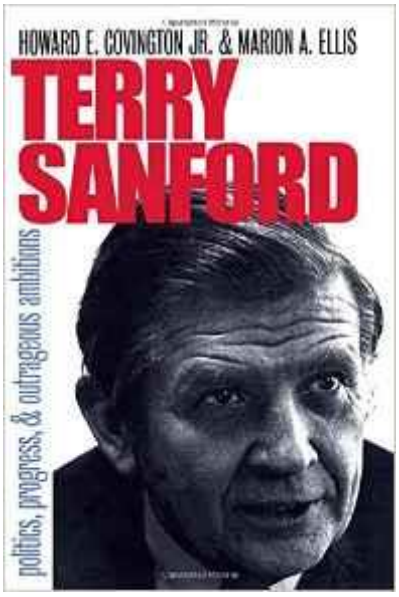
for Katherine Wheeler.

It's a pleasure for us to share these sentences.... so you can do it !!

hello from Sospel, France

Patricia and Roland Orengo

Terry Sanford Biography – The Battling Buzzards



I recently picked up a copy of a biography of **Terry Sanford**. Terry fought with the 1st Battalion and Bill Boyle. He later was president of Duke University, governor of North Carolina, a state senator and a two-time candidate for President of the U.S.

Terry Sanford: Politics, Progress, and Outrageous Ambitions – September 15, 1999

by Howard E. Covington Jr. and Marion A. Ellis

On the following pages is an excerpt from the chapter about his time with the 517th.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Battling Buzzards

No one was more apprehensive about Terry Sanford's decision to enlist in the Army and volunteer for the paratroopers than his mother. Despite her son Cecil's repeated brushes with death, Terry was the son she feared would not return from the war. He had shown he was responsible and had distinguished himself at Chapel Hill, accomplishing more than most young men his age, but she worried that his impetuous streak, the daredevil ambition that led him to learn to fly an airplane, would get him killed.

Terry was having his own second thoughts before he arrived on a cold morning in late November at a former National Guard training post near Toccoa, Georgia, that had been called Camp Toombs before the regular Army took it over. The foreboding of the former name, chosen to honor one of Georgia's Civil War heroes, was only emphasized by the location of the Toccoa rail station next to a casket company.

On the train ride from Kentucky, Terry discovered he was the old man at twenty-five among his eighteen- and nineteen-year-old companions who had signed up to go to war by jumping out of airplanes. Some had come up poor, just as he had, but they had taken turns that had not led to college or the FBI; they had been persuaded to enlist by recruiters who had promised that their criminal records would be expunged if they joined the paratroopers. Sanford had tried to get Bill McCachren to come with him, but McCachren wasn't about to trade the prospects of a Navy commission. As Sanford pondered his choice he had his own doubts about shelving the security and respectability of the FBI to become a slick-sleeve private among what one historian

later called "adventurous kids from the wrong side of the tracks."

Fortune did improve shortly after he stepped down from the train in Georgia and heard someone call his name. A young lieutenant ran up and threw his arms around him. Terry was pleased, but confused. Although he didn't let on, he couldn't remember the fellow's name, yet Tom Lytle, an Asheville native who had been a few years behind him at Chapel Hill, treated him like a long-lost brother. Lytle was in charge of moving the recruits to the training site and he offered Terry a ride in his jeep while the others bounced into Camp Toccoa on hard wooden seats in the back of a truck. Later that night Terry finally put the name and face together.

Camp Toccoa was situated in the foothills of the southern Appalachians of northern Georgia. Despite its remote location, it was the primary receiving depot for volunteers for the paratroops from across the United States. The camp had been hastily outfitted as the Army scrambled to in- crease the ranks of this new service. Only days before Terry enlisted, American paratroopers had seen their first combat action when units dropped ahead of ground troops during the Allies' November push into Tunisia. News magazines had carried reports of the paratroopers that read like promotional releases for the 1941 RKO Radio movie *Parachute Battalion* a rousing feature-length picture starring Robert Preston, Edmund O'Brien, and Buddy Ebsen that closed with paratroopers marching past the camera singing their new song, "The Parachute Infantry."

The paratroopers diving out of airplanes for Hollywood's benefit were from the 501st Parachute Battalion, the first paratroop outfit. It had been organized in 1940 with fifty volunteers who were sent to practice riding parachutes to the ground from 125-foot towers like those that entertained tourists at the 1939 World's Fair. Previously, the Army had considered parachute jumping little more than a novelty, leaving practical use to the U.S. Forest Service, which had more trained jumpers than the military. Army commanders changed their minds after learning of the success of both German and Russian paratroop units in the early days of the war in Europe."

Now the Army was in a hurry to expand the 501st from five hundred troopers to nearly five thousand, and was forming new battalions from the thousands of volunteers who arrived weekly at Camp Toccoa. This was no movie set, however. Conditions were spartan. Terry spent his first night on the floor because there weren't enough bunks for new arrivals; the mess hall was short of regular rations so breakfast was cold turnip greens and light bread. So much for the recruiter's promise of steak at every meal. Disappointment followed during the day when Terry filed through the medical tent .for his initial examination and the physician marked him for requalification because of flat feet. Terry knew his arches were fine and went looking for Lytle, who learned that the doctor had "disqualified" a number of otherwise promising men to keep them from being assigned to a rifle platoon; he planned to use his rejects to staff a medical unit. The following day Terry was "examined" again and assigned to the medical detachment.

The 501st cadre drew on the talents of the recruits to help with the training and Terry was immediately given responsibilities. He had completed just about every course the American

Red Cross had to offer and the Boy Scouts had trained him how to live in the field. More important was the FBI weapons training that he had completed less than nine months earlier. He was assigned to teach marksmanship to the medical detachment and became an assistant to the unit's first sergeant. Every prospective trooper was expected to qualify as a sharpshooter on his primary weapon and marksman on a second. The choices included the .45 caliber pistol, the M-l rifle, and the submachine gun. Terry also studied the Army's Manual of Arms and succeeded in producing troops who could properly shoulder a weapon and march in step.

The first phase of the basic training at Toccoa was to weed out the faint-hearted. Virtually upon arrival, recruits were ordered up a thirty-five-foot tower where they slipped into a parachute harness and were told to ride a cable to the ground. Those who refused to jump and retreated down the ladder were shipped off to the regular infantry. When Terry got to the edge of the platform, he followed the advice to concentrate on the horizon, not the ground below, and sailed safely down the cable to a relatively soft landing in a sand pile.

Physical conditioning was the second measure of whether a man remained with the outfit. The paratroop units were less than two years old, but already a mystique had developed around them. An article in the American Legion's magazine had described them as "the hardest, toughest soldiers in the Army." Troopers and their officers moved everywhere at double-time and began the day with two-mile runs. At least twice a week the men ran the three-and-a-half miles to the fire tower atop Mount Curahee, a promontory that rose above the rolling hills of the Georgia countryside.

Less than half of those who stepped off the train at Toccoa made it through jump training. Terry had arrived more than twenty pounds over- weight, but he was strong and in good condition. In a letter home after his first three weeks he was upbeat and enthusiastic. The family had sent along nuts, cakes, tangerines, and a chess set. "It might be some time until I play chess, but that is a neat outfit," he wrote his parents. He spent Christmas day with the family of a doctor in Toccoa and the holiday passed with little excitement and a modest meal. It wasn't home, but "they had rugs on the floor and egg nog, etc.," he wrote his folks.

When the eight weeks of training, most of it conducted outdoors in the mud and cold rain of a Georgia winter, was over Terry was wearing the stripes of a staff sergeant. During the brief interim before his unit was due at Fort Benning near Columbus, Georgia, for jump training, he made plans to meet Margaret Rose in Charlotte. He qualified for a weekend pass but had no dress uniform, only the fatigues he had been issued when he arrived. He wasn't going to miss the trip for the sake of a suit of clothes and borrowed an officer's uniform, sewed on his sergeant's stripes, and headed off to North Carolina for a rendezvous with his bride. He risked court martial if his irregular dress was discovered, so he braced for the con- sequences when an Army major dining in the same Charlotte restaurant as the young couple called him over and asked what kind of uniform he was wearing. "Paratrooper," Sanford answered smartly. "We're different, you know." The officer seemed to appreciate learning something about the Army's new service and wished him well.

Jump training followed at Fort Benning, where the south Georgia countryside was so flat and dusty that in the summertime the training ground was called "the Frying Pan." There the new men mastered the paratrooper's drop-and-roll, a standard landing technique practiced with jumps from platforms, each one a little higher than the last. Next, they moved to con- trolled jumps with chutes guided by cables and finally a free fall from a 250-foot tower. Each day's schedule included more physical training, field exercises, and judo. Finally, in their fourth week, the troops double-timed to the airstrip and climbed aboard C-47s for their first real jump.

Americans were fascinated with the new parachute troops, and weekly and monthly periodicals obliged their interest. One publication, *American Magazine,* carried a description of jump school written by a trooper who completed his training about the same time as Terry. "We all sweat out very jump. We get up in the morning thinking of it, and all the time we're waiting to go up, all the time we're in the plane until we jump, we have a million butterflies in our stomachs and are sweating like hell. But after we get out the door, the chute opens and we look up and see that it is all right, with no suspension lines over the canopy, and the tension just drops away. We see we're OK and we look up again and say, 'Oh, you sweet beautiful baby you.'"

Terry's first jump was sheer excitement, another challenge, another adventure. It was the Boy Scouts for grownups. His knees were steady when he stood in the open doorway of the C-47 despite the fact that everything rational told him men don't leap from airplanes. He focused on the horizon and waited for the jump master's instructions. His exit went smoothly and the white nylon opened with a powerful jerk a few seconds after he fell beyond the prop blast of the plane, spreading a thirty-two-foot canopy above him. Altogether, he made his required five jumps without incident, trying at least once to land standing. In mid-April he qualified to sew the blue-and-white paratroop patch on his uniform. Proudly, he tucked his pant legs into his jump boots, a distinctive style that set the troopers apart from the "straight-leg" infantry.

His jump training over, Terry left Fort Benning for Camp Mackall, a paratroop training camp in the North Carolina Sand hills on the edge of Scotland County. Mackall was named for the first trooper killed in action in North Africa and was located at the edge of the huge military reservation at Fort Bragg, where the XVIII Airborne Corps had its headquarters. Bragg had become the training center for the 82nd and 101st as well as the 11th and 13th Airborne Divisions. When Terry arrived at Mackall he was made assistant first sergeant in the 501st's Regimental medical detachment. The new post couldn't have brought him closer to home; Laurinburg was less than thirty miles away. After he was promoted to first sergeant a month later, he would hail a jeep and a driver and make it home to McLaurin Street in time for dinner with his family.

For an isolated farming community, Laurinburg was in the thick of the stateside war effort. Fort Bragg was the largest artillery post in the world. Established in 1918 during World War I, it covered 122,000 acres, much of it empty, cut-over timber land where exploding shells splintered the few remaining pine trees and pounded the sandy soil. In 1940, only fifty- four

hundred troops were assigned there, but that changed dramatically in 1942. By the end of the war, more than one hundred thousand would fill the barracks hastily constructed on the post. The Bragg complex also included Pope Air Field, where the transports for the paratroops were based. Another Army air base was just east of Laurinburg at Maxton.

Military men and their families had overwhelmed Fayetteville, an otherwise sleepy eastern North Carolina farming community. Renters spilled over into the nearby towns of Hamlet and Laurinburg, where soldiers and their wives took rooms in private homes. Now that Terry was finished with his initial training, Margaret Rose came south and moved into Betsy and Cecil Sanford's house, where she was welcomed like a daughter.

The Sanford family had joined the war effort. For Terry's father, the war brought steady work at good pay. He signed on at the Wilmington ship- yards and his new paycheck supplied the cash for the last payment on his house. He spent weekdays away from Laurinburg, riding the train home for the weekends. Daughter Mary, who dreamed of becoming an architect, also found work in Wilmington. She had begun studies at Woman's College in Greensboro, planning to transfer to State College in Raleigh to study architecture, but in 1942 she took a job drawing construction plans for troop and cargo ships that her father was helping to build.

Terry was undergoing combat training with the 501st when his application was approved for Officers Candidate School. The Army had revamped its plans to recruit officers for paratroop outfits from the regular infantry after discovering that it was easier to train paratroopers to be officers than to find officers who wanted to be jumpers. The day after his first wedding anniversary, July 5, Terry headed back to Fort Benning as part of the first contingent of paratroopers picked for officer training.

En route to Georgia, Sanford met Dean Swem, a husky, gravel-voiced crane operator from southwestern Michigan who had enlisted in the Army right after Pearl Harbor. He had learned of the paratroops from a platoon sergeant who had been in one of the first test platoons. Swem liked the promise of excitement and better pay and volunteered. He had finished training at Toccoa ahead of Terry and was a first sergeant in the 501st when he signed up for OCS. Swem was all Army, a stickler for details, and proud of his family's military tradition, which included two brothers in other Army units. He took a liking to Sanford and his wry, self-deprecating humor. At Fort Benning, Sanford and Swem often shared rides into Columbus, where their wives had found small apartments. Geneva Swem had followed Dean from camp to camp from the day they were married in Toccoa. Later, when he was transferred to Camp Mackall, the couple had rented rooms in Hamlet in the home of a retired railroad engineer.

Sanford and Swem were nearing graduation from OCS when Swem washed out. He blamed it on another candidate who resented his gung- ho attitude and gave him bad marks in a "buddy system" evaluation. Terry almost jeopardized his own graduation when, in a display of paratrooper bluster, he showed up in formation with his trousers tucked in his boots, paratroop style, rather than loose like the regular infantry. He received his bars, however, and took his commission on November 9, 1943, before heading back to Camp Mackall to become a platoon

leader in A Company, First Battalion, and 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

By the time Terry finished OCS, he was trim, fit, and the image of the perfect paratrooper. He had qualified as an expert with a .45-caliber machine gun, or "grease gun," as it was called, as well as the standard-issue M-1, but he also received training in light and heavy machine guns, mortars, and the M-1 carbine. As a newly minted lieutenant he also was qualified in night infiltration, map reading, close combat, jungle fighting, street fighting, and malaria control.

With Terry again stationed at Camp Mackall, Margaret Rose returned to Laurinburg and found a job as a secretary in the draft board office. The move was only temporary. The 517th, along with every other parachute unit, was being prepared for the invasion of Europe and took part in the so-called Tennessee maneuvers, a massive training exercise that opened in miserable weather in late January 1944. Terry was assigned to the 2nd Army's umpire pool, a job that kept him in the cold and mud for two weeks and landed him in the Camp Campbell, Kentucky, hospital for a week for treatment of a severe case of poison oak on his face and hands.

That spring Margaret Rose prepared to return to Kentucky before the 517th moved out in early May for Camp Patrick Henry near Newport News, Virginia. Rumors said the unit was to sail to England, where the Allies were massing troops for the long-expected cross-channel invasion and that air- borne units were sure to participate. The 501st, Terry's old unit, and others already had gone over. In preparation for its first combat assignment, the 517th Infantry Regiment was combined with the 460th Parachute Artillery Battalion and the 596th Parachute Engineer Company to form the 517th Regimental Combat Team. Together the three units were to operate as a highly mobile small division.

Whatever anxiety Terry may have harbored on the train to Camp Toccoa eighteen months earlier had now vanished. He was convinced that joining the paratroopers was the right thing to do, the only thing to do. He had won his bars the hard way, but he had finally accomplished what he had failed to do when he made the rounds of the recruiting offices before the war. And he certainly had a chance to match the tales his brother Cecil might bring home after the war.

Though that would be tough. Cecil had been in virtually every theater of the war. After Pearl Harbor, his ship had seen action at Midway, then sailed into the South Atlantic, passed through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean, and was then waiting to join the Navy patrols to protect the Allied invasion at Normandy. Even before Pearl Harbor, Cecil had narrowly escaped losing his ship. He had been assigned to the Armed Guard prior to America's entry into the war and was in a convoy delivering materials to Russia when his ship had to drop out because of engine trouble. A few days later, German airplanes discovered the convoy in the North Sea and sank every vessel.

On May 17, the 517th boarded a former luxury liner, the *Santa Rosa*, and joined a convoy sailing east. In addition to a detachment of replacement aviators, the ship also carried two hundred Wacs. Their final destination was unknown until the convoy passed the hulking Rock of Gibraltar in the dead of night and they knew they were headed to Italy, not England. The

convoy reached Naples on May 31.6

After taking Sicily in a swift invasion, the Allied forces had begun rolling up the Italian peninsula. Naples had been liberated, and when the *Santa Rosa* arrived, Terry's unit was ordered to join the American forces closing in on Rome. The 517th was immediately sidelined, however, because its *vehicles* and crew-served weapons were aboard another ship which was overdue. Second Lieutenant Sanford was camped with his men in the crater of an extinct volcano when he learned that his old outfit, the 501st, had jumped into France behind the beaches at Normandy as part of the largest invasion force assembled in the war.

Rome fell on June 6, the same day Allied forces landed at Normandy and began pushing inland across France. All attention was focused on operations in France, and the men of the 517th began to think they were going to spend the rest of the war in a nameless lava pit. Terry was not impressed with Italy, at least not at first. He called it a "dirty land of beggars" in a letter home. But in a light tone that would color most of his mail to the states, he put as good a face on the situation as he could: "It is spring and we are living in the crater of an old volcano that was, before the war, reserved for the King's hunting."

In mid-June, with its heavy weapons intact, the 517th waited for landing raft in preparation for a landing farther up the Italian coast at Anzio. By the time their boats arrived they were no longer needed, and the units were dropped at the small fishing village of Civitavecchia north of Rome. They pushed out into the rugged mountains, where two weeks of fighting gave the 517th its first taste of combat against German units retreating north- ward.

The 517th performed well. Its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Rupert D. Graves, liked what he saw of his officers and men, whom he would later call the 517th buzzards, an image captured in the unit's logo. He had taken command just a few days before they had sailed for Europe, replacing a cocky, aggressive younger commander who had organized the unit and led it through training. The men and officers of his new command were anxious about the change and treated Graves cautiously. He was West Point (class of 1924) and older by a dozen years or more than the officers in command. He couldn't help but be pleased with the 517th's training record - the unit had broken all manner of records - but the men were untested in battle.

Terry's first taste of combat came in action against German units retreating through the Italian mountains. It gave him an unexpected sense of exhilaration that he kept to himself. In the brief notes he scribbled in pencil on V-mail letters sent back to Laurinburg or Hopkinsville, his messages were breezy and light, more like a travelogue of a vacation than a description of war. "I'm living in a house now," he wrote in mid-July, "and sleeping on an inner-spring mattress – although I have no bed. An old, cross-eyed woman, her 70-year-old father, and cute little blond bambini – about 4 – live with us. The old lady keeps the place clean and we bring her left-over food every few days for rent. Life is simple."

By the first of July, the 517th was pulled off the line and sent into reserve, which offered the men time to look around. Terry went to Rome, which he liked better than Naples, and visited

Vatican City, "which was old and not as clean" as he expected but where he found chocolate and vanilla ice cream. "The people differ from Americans in that they have evidently in the past given pedestrians the right of way over automobiles," he observed in one letter. "They walk in the center of the road and make no move when they hear a vehicle, but the boys have introduced the American custom of running over them, so they're learning our ways."

Like England earlier in the year, Italy had become a staging area for invasion and Terry discovered a number of friends from Laurinburg and Chapel Hill among the thousands of Americans stuffed into cantonment areas. He had seen Mutt McCoy shortly after his unit had landed. In July he wrote home to tell about another Carolina chum: "He's been over here two years, but that is easy by the fact that he is in the Air Corps ground service with a house and bed with springs. I'm not envious, of course. (I keep telling myself.)" Another friend from Chapel Hill, Daywell M. Anderson, sent the Sanford family a photograph of Terry standing in the door of his airplane. He also sent one to Margaret Rose, who had found a teaching job for the upcoming school year.

The 517th was to be part of the Allied invasion of southern France. General Dwight D. Eisenhower had continued to push for it although the British command wanted all available units to join the fighting in northern Europe. Eisenhower had his eye on the port of Marseilles and prevailed. First code-named Anvil and later renamed Dragoon, the invasion was set for August 15. The paratroopers would be the first in, jumping behind the German coastal defenses at night to secure key locations before being relieved by a landing force due to land at Toulon on the southern coast.

The mission of the 517th's First Battalion – its part in the last large nighttime airborne invasion of the war – was the capture of a point of high ground overlooking a major highway and railroad overpass about three miles west of Le May. The troops were to seize and hold critical junctions and prevent German troops garrisoned there from reinforcing the coast against the Allies' seaborne force. In addition, the 517th was to clear the countryside of obstacles and prepare landing sites for glider troops due at daybreak. In the days leading up to the invasion, platoon leaders such as Terry spent hours around a sand table where the details of the French countryside were replicated in miniature. Roads, Streams, even houses, barns, and village streets had been reproduced. Secrecy was paramount and the names of French towns were replaced with Hoboken, Milwaukee, and others. Troopers were not told the exact location until days before the operation was to begin, when French-language phrase books were distributed.

An American paratrooper carried more than one hundred pounds of weapons and equipment when he jumped out of a C-47 flying at about ninety miles an hour fifteen hundred feet up in the sky. In addition to the main and reserve chutes, each trooper was armed with either an M-I rifle or a submachine gun, eighty rounds of ammunition, three fragmentation grenades, and two knives. He also carried a gas mask, Mae West life preserver, entrenching tool, personal items, and enough food and water to last two days. Some men carried escape kits that included maps and a compass, along with $100 in American currency. Terry also packed fifteen cigars sent by

his dad. Because his "stick," or jump unit, included the mortar squad, he had extra rounds stuffed in his pack.

Terry was scheduled to jump with his platoon in A Company, but just hours before the planes were loaded he was ordered to take over as executive officer of B Company after the company commander became ill and B Company's executive officer, First Lieutenant Charles Hillsdale, moved II p to replace him. During the two weeks of fighting north of Rome Terry had developed a reputation as a steady leader, someone who, when given a job, would complete it with efficiency and dispatch.

On the evening of August 14, the paratroopers completed the rigging or-their packs and smeared greasepaint made by Lily Dacha, the cosmetics manufacturer, on their faces and hands as camouflage. They had already been through a spray-paint line, where clothing and equipment had received a dose of varying shades of yellow, green, and black that now was dry and crusty on their jumpsuits. At midnight, the First Battalion marched 10 waiting planes at the Canino airfield and climbed aboard. At one o'clock, pilots in 396 C-47s cranked their engines and began taking off from ten airfields across northern Italy. By the time the first planes carrying the fifty-six hundred paratroopers of a combined American and British force reached the French coast, the entire formation was nearly a hundred miles long.

Terry was the jump master of plane 36, part of the sixth series of C-47s. With him in his stick were the company first sergeant, company headquarters personnel, a mortar squad, and the battalion aidmen. As his plane headed for the French coast he could see the outline of ships carry the landing force? He thought about his brother and wondered whether Cecil's destroyer was among those massed in the Mediterranean. Just after five in the morning Terry saw the red light appear overhead and he took his place at the head of the line. He stood in the open doorway intent on the glowing bulb. When the red turned to green he jumped out into the dark night. One by one the others followed until the last man, the first sergeant, cleared the door.

From his time around the sand table Sanford knew what to look for in the terrain where his men were due to land. Moments after he hit the ground, he realized that the pilots had misjudged their location. In fact, Terry and his troopers were about ten miles northeast of the intended drop zone, but in no worse shape than most of the others. Altogether, only 20 percent of the entire unit had landed on target in a wide valley west of Le Muy. The First Battalion had been scattered over thirty-five to forty square miles by anxious pilots who became disoriented by an unexpected fog bank that cut visibility to a half mile. (Later investigation also found gross navigational error and the failure of a lighting system designed to coordinate the release of troops from the planes.)

To make matters worse, the Germans had been expecting the paratroopers, despite Allied attempts at secrecy. The night before the jump, American soldiers listening to propaganda broadcasts from Berlin were told that they wouldn't need their parachutes because they could walk to earth on the flak. Ironically, the Germans believed the invasion force was much larger than it really was and the scattered troops reinforced that notion as the Americans were seen all

across the countryside. By daybreak, the hills and pastures were littered with parachutes and German patrols had begun to engage the invaders.

When he landed, Terry found himself on the edge of a patch of woods near a ravine. Nothing looked familiar except the first sergeant, who had landed nearby along with equipment bundles containing mortar shells and other gear that went out the door with the third and fourth man. Using the password and countersign of "Lafayette" and "Democracy," a handful of the fifteen who had left plane 36 found one another. Not all could be accounted for. One man was dead for sure. Uncertain of his location and confident that there were plenty of Germans in the area, Terry waited until daylight to move. He gave orders to leave the equipment bundles after he decided that the bulky containers would slow their movement cross- country. When the first sergeant balked at his order to leave government equipment unguarded, he learned the easygoing Southerner was not to be trifled with, at least not on a battlefield. Lieutenant Sanford raised his machine gun and reminded the sergeant that disobeying a direct order in combat was a serious offense. The equipment remained behind.

As the group was making its way out of the woods, Terry spotted a single C-47 escorted by two fighters fly over and leaves two parachutes opening in its wake. When Terry approached the jumpers he saw American flags stitched to their shoulders and found him standing face-to-face with Major General Robert T. Frederick, the task force commander. Frederick commandeered Terry and his squad and ordered the paratroopers to provide security for his headquarters in a nearby chateau. As they approached the building, they found a group of British troopers already encamped and brewing tea. The British had been assigned to clear landing areas for the gliders that were expected in the early morning. They had done the best they could, but the Germans had erected all manner of barriers, rock piles, and poles, as well as mined the suspected landing areas. After Terry saw the damage that these obstructions did to the flimsy gliders, he was grateful he had arrived by parachute.

The house Frederick had chosen for his headquarters was occupied by a family that gave the Americans a warm welcome. "The women quickly packed their belongings in baskets," Sanford later wrote home, "covered their heads with shawls, and took to the hills, not knowing whether we had come in strength, not knowing if we could drive the Allemande out." 13 Most of the men remained behind, including one old farmer whose hero- ism Terry would never forget. Time after time the man led his horse-drawn cart out into the nearby open fields braving sniper fire to retrieve wounded Americans and carry them to the American aidmen.

Terry was eager to be on his way and rejoin his outfit. Shortly after noon, with the arrival of Frederick's security detail, he and a force growing in size with each hour headed south led by one of the farmers who knew the territory. Terry commandeered an old steam-powered truck, and moved along picking up other troopers attempting to find their units. As they moved down country roads, residents who had been hiding in their homes ran out to welcome them. "It was as if they knew we were coming," Terry wrote home, "and had sat up waiting." Some warned of ambush by Germans. Terry's men moved cautiously, but after responding to repeated

unfounded warnings finally decided that at least in their immediate area the Germans were otherwise occupied. "We figured they didn't know what they were talking about, so ... we smiled and said 'No, Allemande kaput,' or smiled and said 'Merci, get the hell out of the way.' But I loved them because they wept at our feet." At one house, Terry stopped to listen to a man's insistent requests that he come in, "and not just for a hospitable bottle of wine. We found in his bedroom one of our men who had been shot through the cheek, cared for by an old solid woman who was bathing his bloody face with warm water. They had found him in the field unconscious and had brought him in before there were any other American troops around. We took him, and by this time our standard exchange was a 'V' with the fingers, and 'Vive la France!' and their answer was, 'No! No! Vive la American!'"

By late afternoon Terry had reached his objective with an accumulated force of about fifty men. When he arrived, he learned that B Company's commander, Lieutenant Hillsdale, was still unaccounted for, along with the battalion commander, Major William J. Boyle. Hillsdale and his troopers had landed some fifteen miles west of Terry, near the town of Lorgues, and immediately encountered enemy patrols as they made their way cross-country. Boyle and about fifty men were under heavy attack in Les Arcs, a crossroads village. Boyle, a determined West Pointer (class of 1939), refused to give up his position and held off repeated assaults. He and his group at the "Little Alamo," as they called it, remained isolated until reinforcements arrived on the afternoon of the second day, when Boyle pulled out and finally reached his command post on a steep bluff west of Les Arcs called Roque Rousse.

Boyle's headquarters was on the same high ridge as the regimental command post, which was located in an old ivy-covered complex of buildings surrounded by vineyards called Chateau Saint Rosaline. Some of the chateau's buildings dated to the medieval period and the remains of fourteenth-century Rosaline de Villeneuve were preserved in a nearby abbey. The chateau's owner, Baron de Rasque de Laval, welcomed the Americans. His own son, Louis, was a captain in the French II Corps, which was about to disembark as part of the sea invasion. As the fighting continued through the day, a courtyard at the chateau became the main aid station.

From the heights, Boyle directed the fighting that continued in a large vineyard and along the railroad west of Les Arcs. While artillery pounded the vineyard, B Company, temporarily under Terry's command, held a road- block on the major roadway into the town near the point of the railroad overpass. Around two o'clock in the afternoon a motorized patrol from the first of the seaborne forces arrived at the roadblock and inquired whether the overpass had been prepared for demolition. Terry didn't know for sure and sent a nine-man squad forward to investigate. Just as the men approached the bridge they were caught in the open by a larger group of Germans moving west toward the roadblock. The squad leader and two privates were killed and a third was seriously wounded. Four others were pinned down and couldn't move. One trooper escaped and returned immediately to warn the others. The Germans engaged B Company in a fight that lasted two hours before they withdrew back toward the bridge.

Another day passed before Hillsdale and the missing men of B Company arrived at the

roadblock. While they had waited for Hillsdale, Terry had sent a detail back to the jump site to recover the body of the trooper who had been killed early on D-Day and found that local people had given him a complete Catholic burial service at a village chapel. The young lieutenant from Laurinburg was touched by the warmth of villagers who had cared for his wounded men, buried his dead comrades, and offered food, wine, and kisses. Yet, at the same time, he was angered by the vicious response that he witnessed among Frenchmen who, when certain they would no longer be subject to German reprisals, heaped their own brutality on prisoners taken in the fighting.

Back home, the Sanfords and Margaret Rose waited anxiously for news of the invasion of southern France. "One of my friends out here - Viola, stayed with me Tuesday night," Margaret Rose wrote the Sanfords two weeks after the invasion. "And we talked and talked - Her husband is in the invasion of S. France too. He's on a LST – and so she heard from him the other day." Finally, in a letter dated September 3, the Sanfords got their first letter from their son and immediately wired Margaret Rose that he was safe.

Terry revealed little in his early letters and said nothing about the confusion surrounding the first days of combat. "We had a well-planned jump and it didn't go too badly, according to the newspaper reports I've seen," he wrote in one letter. He said he had heard from friends in the 501st who had been part of the Normandy invasion, including one who was awarded a Silver Star. He did not mention his part in the engagement with the Germans at the roadblock, for which General Frederick would later recommend him for a Bronze Star. Instead, he was cheerful and upbeat: "You don't need to worry about this boy. The life suits me fine. I'm getting plenty of goat's milk from the natives and I'm taking life as easy as it can be taken in combat."

Margaret Rose had received word from Terry at about the same time as the Sanfords. By the time these letters arrived in the States, however, the 517th was moving northeast through France. Before heading out, the unit had been given a few days rest at the chateau, and a multicolored tent city sprang up in the countryside. Replacements arrived to fill the slots vacated by the killed and wounded, and the troopers shed jumpsuits for clean fatigues. Altogether the regiment had lost 19 killed, 126 wounded, and 137 injured in the jump -- about 14 percent, which was higher than the average for the airborne units involved in Dragoon. The impact of the losses was all the greater because they had occurred in just two days of fighting. By the end of August, after traveling northwest on a route parallel to the coast, all the airborne troops had crossed the Var River. Beyond lay the towering peaks of the Maritime Alps and the retreating Germans, who had taken fortified positions along the treacherous, narrow, winding mountain roads.

Sanford's outfit pushed on into the mountains, where fighting was intermittent but fierce in the rugged terrain. During September, the regiment lost more men than it had in August, including a buddy of Terry's, Lieutenant Charles Sadlo, who had rejoined the unit after being wounded on D-Day; he would be killed in combat in October 1944. Sadlo had been responsible for the only

nickname that Terry ever answered to. Because their last names could be confused in radio transmissions, radio operators called Sanford "Fat Sam"; Sadlo was "Slim." As a youngster, Terry had fiercely resisted being called anything but his given name.

In mid-September, Terry's thoughts were pulled home when he saw a curé in a mountain village preparing a school for fall classes. "[He] was cleaning our equipment out of the school so he can get started here, and it reminded me of the preparation at home. Don't work too hard," he wrote his mother in one letter. The longer the 5I7th remained in France, the more ferry saw that both thrilled and disgusted him. "There can be no comparison between these people and the Italians," he wrote his parents. "The French have fought with us; though unorganized and poorly equipped, they led us through German lines, cared for our wounded, buried our dead. They deserve to be free." In one village after another, the paratroopers were cheered as liberators: "As we came to the towns and through the towns on our march after the enemy we met a population of joyously weeping women, old women (and young) who wanted to kiss every soldier, men and women standing in the streets pouring out wine for the passing troops, middle-aged women singing the songs they had learned in 1917 – 'Pack up your troubles…' - 'It's a long way…' 'America.' Little girls and little boys (who had not yet learned to say: 'Chew gum please') throwing flowers and passing out grapes and fruit."

One day he was on patrol with two other troopers when they reached the top of a mountain and found a small cottage. Inside was an old shepherd. "Bon jour," the man said, "I am glad to see you." He invited the soldiers inside and served them warm goat's milk flavored with sugar and a pinch of coffee. He told them he had not seen any Germans so high in the mountains. "I stay up here with the wind and my goats most of the time, and the Germans have never bothered me. But the people are free now; the Americans want nothing except for the people to be free; and they will leave when the fighting is done."

In the same letter in which he told of the warmth and hospitality of the shepherd, he recounted another incident at a village where he and his men had taken a pounding from German artillery: "We were met by an irate mayor who said: 'We have never had any Germans here before; we have never been shelled before; and now when you come the Germans have almost destroyed our town and one of our babies has been killed.' 'Yes, damn you,' we said, 'and we lost twenty men getting here today. Now take us to a spot where we can see the valley or there will be *two* French dead in this town today.'" He also observed that the towns through which he passed were filled with men wearing the armbands of the FFI (Free French of the Interior):

There were now fifty johnnies-come-lately with the FFI insignia swaggering in the streets and saloons, basking in the glory earned by the fighting spirits and the blood of the men who were not afraid to resist. They smoked American cigarettes, and many of them wore American clothes, and all of them would privately state that they had liberated France.

And in the windows of their shops, and on their billboards, and in their papers were ten pictures of Stalin to two of Roosevelt to one of Churchill. (I accredit this not to public sentiment, but to the usual efficient organization of The International.)

So there are some of both, and there are some of all kinds. And just as we have many people who dodge the draft, and are afraid War Bonds are a bad investment, and sell defective wire to the Army, and buy black market gas, those people are not America; and these people of France who have placed themselves in the fullest view of the American troops are surely not France.

Such an outpouring of commentary was unusual for Terry, whose letters included mostly details of his diet- fried rabbit and K rations seemed regular items-and grateful thanks for the packages he received from home. Late in September he told his mother he appreciated the soap she sent but said he had nowhere to use it: "We haven't gotten water to waste with washing." He thanked his father for a handful of cigars. The fifteen he carried with him on the jump had been supplemented by an occasional gift from another trooper. He was out of smokes when his father's resupply arrived. "They hit the spot. I am smoking one now." The souvenirs he mailed to Margaret Rose included a piece of his parachute, a gold Cross of Lorraine he said a marquis had given him, and shoulder patches from a German aviator's uniform. Another package included phonograph records and a photograph album with pictures of Rome.

In early October, after fifty days of combat, Terry got his first pass. He and other officers enjoyed the best of the luxury hotels in Nice, where the prices were right but the diet limited; the restaurants, short of regular supplies, served C rations to their guests. He did get his first hot bath since Italy. Terry called Nice "the watering point of millionaires. I paid 75 francs ($1.50) per night at the best, for a room facing the Mediterranean through full glass doors." His time in combat had passed quickly, he said. "Hope the war ends before the snows start."

The regiment's push into the Alps continued until late October, when it reached the town of Sospel near the Italian border. German troops holding the town had been under attack for nearly two months when they suddenly evacuated the town, leaving nothing but destruction behind. Forty-four townspeople had been killed and a hundred lay wounded from the artillery barrages. The hospital and bridges had been demolished. Sospel was the last French town liberated, but there was no cheering or flowing vine when the 517th's F Company patrol arrived. The Americans also were puzzled by the German retreat. They left behind a heavily fortified position. No one in the West was aware of the concentration of German strength hat was already underway behind the screen of the dense Ardennes forest farther north.

As winter closed in on the French Alps the 517th was pulled out of southern France and sent to the town of Soissons, located about eighty miles north of Paris, where amidst rain and mud the unit began refitting. Five hundred new men had recently joined the regiment, half to replace combat losses and the others to provide additional firepower for the rifle squads. An eight-week schedule of training had been prescribed for replacements and veterans were told to shape up. The regimental command felt the appearance and tone of the officers had slipped badly during the weeks in the field. Accordingly, the evening meal became a military formation with dress uniforms required. The menu was still C rations, but at least they were served in style. Terry began planning a Christmas party.

He was a first lieutenant now and had been battalion adjutant since October, when he replaced

another officer who had requested duty with a rifle platoon. His former company commander, Donald Fraser, now a major and executive officer of the battalion, recommended him for the job. So far he had escaped serious injury, and the assignment to headquarters company allowed for a modest margin of safety, although all the officers of the 517th Infantry Regiment were expected to be where the action was. Battalion commander Boyle, now a lieutenant colonel, believed in commanding from the front; within a few minutes of the first shots fired at his men in Italy, he was with the company that had made contact.

It had been raining when the 517th arrived in Soissons and the bad weather looked like it was going to continue through the holidays. Terry settled in to move a mountain of paperwork and was looking forward to a reunion with some of his buddies in the 501st. He also had spent some time visiting Chateau-Thierry and other battlefields from the last great war and had found a filling meal of fresh eggs and steak. In anticipation of Margaret Rose's arrival in Laurinburg, where she planned to spend the Christmas holidays, he was posting his letters to North Carolina rather than Kentucky. A package from his mother containing nuts and mints hit the spot. He was wearing the scarf and sweater she had sent him in anticipation of winter while he wrote a letter home on December 11.

The 517th had been pulled north under a hopeful, even expectant, mood that the war would soon be over. The men were issued fresh clothes, new weapons and equipment and finally were sleeping in beds under a roof. The barracks at Soissons were the first they had seen since Italy. Everyone, from the high command on down, believed that their part of the fighting was all but over. Sketchy reports of activity behind the German lines were discounted. Allied leaders believed the German army defense on the western front "is thinner, more brittle and more vulnerable than it appears on G-2 maps or to troops in the line," one top-level intelligence officer reported.

Then, at dawn on December 16, an overwhelming German counterattack crashed out of the Ardennes, catching American commanders by surprise. Led by an astonishing array of armored vehicles, the Germans rolled over the Allied line, manned by unprepared American soldiers who believed the war had passed them by. The objective of the German effort was the port of Antwerp. Adolf Hitler believed that if his troops could reach the port through which valuable supplies were pouring in to support the Allied effort, he could split his enemy's forces and perhaps reach a negotiated settlement.

The 517th was well back from the initial attack, but the unit was immediately put on alert as the Allied command frantically tried to organize a response. Airborne units such as the 517th, which had been performing like firemen and were assigned where most needed, were immediately called and told to be ready to move with two hours' notice. On December 21, Terry finished a letter home in which he told his parents, "Don't worry about this kid - I'm enjoying life," but he already had carried orders to Boyle that the First Battalion would leave at six that night. It was cold and sleet and snow were falling when the first trucks carrying the men of the 517th pulled out heading north toward Belgium.

At Namur the trucks turned southeast and rolled on through the night and into the next day toward Soy, where they arrived at sunset. The village was under attack and the First Battalion suffered immediate casualties. Boyle had arrived ahead of the convoy and convinced Colonel R. L. Howze of the 36th Armored Infantry, who commanded the Soy garrison, that his men would be ready to fight when they arrived. He organized his troops and, though weary from their twenty-four-hour ride to the front, they moved southwest of the town, where enemy forces had taken positions in the hills at Haid Hits. The initial objective was to take this high round and open the roadway to Hotton, a nearby town where a small isolated unit of American engineers was holding a bridge across the Ourthe River. The initial assault by the First Battalion was repulsed, as were others throughout the evening. The troopers took losses from heavy weapons and machine gun emplacements that controlled the ridges above the narrow valley through which the road passed. Terry felt a sense of doom as the German artillery hammered his unit. He figured he could easily get killed before morning and not even know where he was. Visibility was reduced to grenade range, and the dark forest cast ominous shadows on the deep snow that buried a frozen landscape.

On the morning of the 23rd, Boyle left Major Fraser in command of the force at Haid Hits and with a smaller group swung to the right, bypassing the enemy emplacements. The plan called for him to link up with the forces at Hotton and then turn and advance toward Soy along the highway, where he would meet up with Fraser. Just after noon, Fraser's group, reinforced with nine tanks that had come up from Soy, pushed off again. Fighting continued through the day and into the night, when visibility in the dense underbrush was reduced to just a few feet. Moreover, the region was covered with more than a foot of snow and temperatures were below zero. The bodies of the dead lay where they had fallen, often frozen to the ground. Fraser pressed forward even after German guns knocked out six of the armored vehicles sent to assist his men. The following day, with Boyle moving toward Haid Hits from the opposite direction, Fraser's group pushed the German forces from their position and the First Battalion secured the road.

One of Fraser's men, Pfc Melvin E. Biddle from B Company, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his part in the fighting at Haid Hits. During the night of the 23rd, he was the lead scout and advanced alone into the woods, where over the next several hours he killed seventeen of the enemy with nineteen shots from his M-1. He also knocked out three machine gun emplacements unassisted and led the advance the following morning. During his night in the woods he moved undetected among the German positions, eluding sentries and patrols. He was so close at one point that a German soldier stepped on his hand. The information he gathered helped Fraser flank the German strong point and reach his objective.

On Christmas Eve, the men of the First Battalion were exhausted. They had been on the move for three straight days, in combat for two. Fighting on the 23rd had claimed more than fifty casualties and about the same number on the 24th. With the Soy-Horton road secure, the battalion pulled back to Soy. The fight was far from over. Germans still held positions south of the town, and at the command post intelligence reports told of a new wrinkle. Army

interrogators found that German soldiers in American uniforms had been assigned to destroy the headquarters and disrupt communications: "They are traveling in American jeeps, four to a jeep, and speak with an American accent."

Christmas Day was bitterly cold and snowing. American soldiers were reminded of the holiday by the German machine gunners, who yelled "Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas" as they held off the attacks. At least the First Battalion had spent a night in bedrolls and took their first hot food in three days, a Christmas meal of roast turkey that the men ate in their positions on the line. At noon, however, units of the First Battalion were rousted to head back into action. The night before, two battalions of the 75th Infantry had passed through to press the attack south of Soy. These were green troops, most of who had thought they would be an occupation force. They were badly mauled by the Germans, suffering more than two hundred casualties.

Howze called on Boyle to take his men, who were now holding the Soy-Hotton road, and advance. With A Company and a platoon from C Company, plus Terry and men from headquarters company, Boyle's attack force jumped off shortly after 2 P.M. and pushed toward the ridge through heavy woods. The paratroopers had experience advancing behind an artillery barrage and made it to the heights under intense fire. By dusk the ridge was secure at a cost of forty-six casualties. That evening Boyle and his officers organized a defense of the hill using men from the 75th Division.

On the morning of the 26th, Terry was still on the line. During the night he had moved from one location to another, filling in as Boyle had needed his help in organizing a defensive position along the hill with the shaken and battered remainder of the 75th Division units. He was with a line of infantry on the ridge when the Germans mounted a counterattack. He had his men about four feet apart, just inside trees at the top of a hill whose slopes were open to full view. As a regiment of Germans approached, he ordered his men to hold their fire. Finally, with the Germans within about thirty feet of his position, he ordered them to fire. In the confusion, an officer leading the German counterattack ran into the American line, virtually into Terry's arms. He grabbed him by his belt, ordered him to surrender, and relieved him of two pistols. The officer complied and Terry put the man in the front of his jeep, held a weapon at his back, and drove him to the rear for interrogation. Boyle later received the Distinguished Service Cross III recognition of his leadership in this action and the First Battalion was awarded a Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation.

Many years later Terry would continue to wonder about the fate of his injured officer. He feared that the major was shot before he ever made it to a POW collection point. The men of the 517th knew about the German massacre of American POWs at nearby Malmedy, and American soldiers already had begun to seek their revenge. Moreover, those on the line found it difficult to manage prisoners or send them to the rear and shelter when they themselves were deprived of basic necessities.

Terry revealed none of the brutality of what he had seen and experienced in his letters home. "Christmas was cold but the best I ever spent in this country," he said in a one-line V-mail

written less than forty-eight hours after the action on the ridge south of Hoy. "Just keeping you informed that things are going well in this country," he wrote in another dated a day later. It continued, “More food than elsewhere and more cooperative. Maybe it's because they just had another scare.” He didn't explain that the extra helpings of the belated though hot Christmas meal were due to the high casualty rate in the 517th – rear-echelon cooks had prepared for the unit's full complement.

On New Year’s Day, the 517th moved back into action as the Allies pushed west against steady opposition from the retreating Germans and the worst winter weather Europe had seen in years. At night the temperatures ranged from zero to ten below. Soldiers in foxholes could freeze to death if they fell asleep. Snow was eighteen inches deep and lay on frozen ground virtually impenetrable to the GI's entrenching tool. Visibility was reduced to a few meters, and as Sanford and his troopers moved forward during one night maneuver they had to hold onto the equipment of the man ahead so as not to get lost in the darkness and dense underbrush.

The immediate objective of the First Battalion was the town of Bergeval, which Boyle occupied with two companies before moving on under the cover of darkness to a position on a bluff east of the town. He had been told to expect other Allied units there. When he reached the high ground, his small force was alone and there was evidence of German activity on his flank.

In an effort to better coordinate his position, Boyle, Sanford, and two others headed back to Bergeval. The four were moving across level ground in the darkness when they were challenged in German and dove for cover from machine gun fire, which hit both Boyle and Sanford. At the same heavier fire erupted at a point farther away. The group finally made it to Bergeval, but by the time the two wounded men got to an aid tent, regimental doctor thought Boyle was dead.

Sanford’s wounds were less serious. Medics patched up his left hand where he had been hit by a piece of shrapnel and though his injuries were serious enough to warrant a trip to the rear, he remained with Boyle, holding cigarettes for him as he waited to be evacuated. (Boyle recovered after months of treatment and later fought in Korea.) In Terry's next V-mail home, dated less than a week after he was wounded, he wrote: "Just want you to know that everything is moving along well in these parts.” He made no mention of his wounds.

On January 21the Allies captured the Belgian town of St. Vith, effectively bringing an end to the Battle of the Bulge. The 517th had been in continuous action for thirty-seven days and losses had been heavy; the unit had suffered more than seven hundred casualties. The Allied push was unrelenting, however. After a break of about ten days, the 517th continued east and Terry's mail home was soon coming from Germany. As always, the tone was light as he asked Margaret Rose to furnish him with treats. His shopping list included shrimp, tomato soup, anchovies, sliced pineapples, Chinese food, crackers, cigars, fruit cocktail, and marshmallows.

In late February, the 517th was recalled to Joigny, France, where preparations were being made for an airborne assault. For those who fought in Belgium, it was a defining experience.

Winston Churchill called it the greatest American battle of the war. Losses included more than sixteen thousand killed and sixty thousand wounded. Like thousands of others, Terry would never forget the stark contrasts of dark forests and white snow, punctuated by the brilliance of shell bursts, that would reappear years later as visions of a scene replayed from deep in his memory. He had survived the worst, he believed, and he had performed well, his superiors said in efficiency reports: "Excellent speaker and organizer"; "Obtains maximum results with minimum of effort"; "He is a creative officer with the ability to see ahead and take corrective action; always one step ahead." In the days after the hardest of the fighting he considered an appointment as an aide to General Matthew Ridgeway, the commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps, but passed on the opportunity.

For his service in the Battle of the Bulge, Sanford received a ribbon for the Bronze Star he had won in France as well as a Purple Heart. The 5I7th prepared for more combat jumps as part of the 13th Airborne Division, but each time, the missions were scrubbed after the target areas were overrun by the fast-moving Allied advance into Germany.

Duty at Joigny was pleasant enough, particularly as springtime brought color and life back to the gray land. He visited Paris and the Riviera. He also found himself busy with paperwork as his superiors in the new organization demanded to know what had happened to all the equipment the unit had consumed during nine months in the field. Boyle had never been a stickler for such details and excused his staff officers who failed to record whether a machine gun was left behind because there was no one to carry it.

Terry was halfway through his twenty-eighth year. As was true for millions of men in uniform, his personal plans had been set aside for the duration of the war. Now, sitting on a hillside near Joigny, he reflected on questions that carried more significance in the wake of the brutal consequences of life he had just experienced. "What is personal ambition?" he later wrote in a recollection of that time.

> Is it really important to achieve "something of significance" in your life? What about the political life – why get involved?
>
> Is the kind of commitment that takes your energy off what could be a futile and fruitless venture of politics something to which you should dedicate yourself?
>
> Isn't winning a rather hollow victory after you get it, anyhow? What have you got?
>
> You are here today and gone tomorrow. Aren't you better off if you give your attention to your personal business, letting someone else handle the politics? Let someone else take the shafts and arrows of criticism. Can't you be a good citizen by simply voting, contributing and working in civic drives?

There were more questions than answers.

A few days later, in mid-April, Terry was awakened by the battalion sergeant major, a

man he once described as "a leathery-faced roughneck from the concrete of the Bronx who was about as sentimental as a rifle butt." The sergeant was shaking him by the foot, and through the fog of sleep Terry heard him yelling, "Sir, get up. Get up! Our President is dead." The sergeant's words seared his subconscious. It was "our President," not "the President" or "President Roosevelt." He bounded from bed and stood there in the dark just before dawn and his tears flowed just like those of his sergeant. "Yes, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had suited me fine," he later wrote.

> He won the power and he changed things, changed them so that the government, which is all the people, began to get concerned about all the people. Human dignity began to mean more than it had ever meant since a Virginian had written about it, or even since a Galilean had talked about it.
>
> Every individual was important, and this message began to reverberate around the world, and freedom and opportunity began to take on new meaning everywhere. There wasn't any doubt in my mind why in that April we found ourselves on foreign soil, fighting a war. I was proud to be there.

Administrivia

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- 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:

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