



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

**MailCall No. 2311**

February 14, 2016

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

### *71 Years Ago – February, 1945*

On February 15th **Colonel Graves** was notified by Headquarters XVIII Airborne Corps that the RCT was assigned to the newly-arrived 13th Airborne Division, and was to proceed to Joigny , 70 miles southeast of Paris .

Col. Thomas R. Cross

Dear Tom,

While statistics are quite boring they can be used effectively to demonstrate 517 PIR combat efforts during Battle of the Bulge:

1. During the period 20 Dec 44 through 10 Feb 45 the 517 PIR had net losses of 63 Officers and 888 Enlisted Men. Our 9 rifle companies suffered 714 battle casualties and were reduced from an average strength of 156 to 77.

2. December and January operations near Soy, Manhay, Trois Ponts, Bergeval and Saint Vith resulted in a total of 698 battle casualties. The attrition rate was about 30 men per day.

3. During January 45 the Regimental Aid Station moved 5 times and treated a total of 1122 men. They treated 293 shell fragment, 104 bullet and 69 concussion wounds. Medical reports on these men can be located in records of 662nd, 331st, 105th and 307th Clearing Hospitals.

4. During February operations in Germany the percentage of men killed in relationship to total wounded rose dramatically from 12% to 20%.



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### MailCall News

Hi Bob

Following my announcement on mail call two weeks ago, I was able to interview two additional veterans. Could you perhaps pass my announcement on mail call a second time to hopefully contact a couple of other veterans?

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As you know, I have interviewed a lot of veterans from the 517th in the past when researching my book (Autopsy of Battle <http://www.amazon.com/Operation-Dragoon-Autopsy-Liberation-August-September/dp/076434580X> ). In those days, there were still hundreds of surviving veterans, and I targeted specific people for interviews, based on precise information I had about them and their participation in events I was writing about.

We all sadly know that there are currently only a few dozen survivors of the 517th remaining. I have therefore decided to try to interview any 517th PRCT veterans who were involved in the southern France campaign, regardless of their company, etc.

I am therefore soliciting surviving veterans (or family members of surviving veterans who see this email) who are still in good enough health to remember the events in southern France to get in touch with me if they would like to be interviewed. Interviews are conducted over the phone and recorded; and are later transcribed into written form as time permits. All I need to perform my interviews is therefore a phone number, and all the veteran has to do is be able to speak over the phone.

Anybody who is interested can simply send me an email at [jean-loup@gassend.com](mailto:jean-loup@gassend.com) or express their interest in mailcall.

Here is a list of some of the people I had interviewed in the past and whose accounts are included in my book, and therefore remembered, although most have since passed away: **Edward Athey, Bill Bollin, Gene Brissey, Frank Dallas, Howard Hensleigh, Marvin Moles, Claude Rickards, Robert Dalrymple, Myrle Traver, Lou Holzworth, Lud Gibbons, Tom McAvoy, William Webb, Phil McSpadden, Jim Mortensen, Richard Hammel, Robert Vaught, Leslie Perkins, Bob Newberry, Richard Seitz, Melvin Biddle, and many others...**

**Jean-Loup Gassend**

Author of "Operation Dragoon, Autopsy of a Battle, The Liberation of the French Riviera"  
[jean-loup@gassend.com](mailto:jean-loup@gassend.com)

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I know there are at least 50 517<sup>th</sup> troopers still out there, but only a small group are on MailCall. If you are a family member or in contact with a vet, please consider letting **Jean-Loup** collect their story.

-- BB



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Found at <http://www.techetoday.com/local/special-forces-veterans-honored>

(Lt. Thomas Fred Patin was with the 517<sup>th</sup> Reg HQ)



### Special Forces Veterans Honored

Mon, 2013-11-18 15:01

#### "Cajun Warrior" Statue Dedicated Saturday in Veterans Park

In a highly anticipated ceremony in Veterans Park Saturday, over 300 veterans, many from the Special Forces units, as well as their families, friends, and supporters – including a group of motorcycle enthusiasts – participated in the unveiling of a \$60,000 bronze sculpture commemorating members of the Special Forces, particularly those who hailed from Breaux Bridge.

The artwork's name, "Cajun Warrior," comes from the moniker given to the Breaux Bridge detachment of the U.S. Army National Guard's 20th Special Forces Group (SFG) founded in 1959. Its first commander was **Lt. Col. Fred Patin** from Breaux Bridge, a Silver- and Bronze-Star World War II hero.

The artist, Bill McGlaun of Cleveland, Texas, is known worldwide for his commemorative work and has pieces in such prestigious places as the Vatican and Ground Zero where his American Eagle sculpture sits atop what formerly was the ruins of the World Trade Center.

While a testament to the vision of local Special Forces Chapter 81, the "Cajun Warrior" monument would nonetheless not have been possible without the generous support of J. Weldon and Fran Granger of Houston, who donated the work. An Erath native, Granger is a philanthropist with a special interest in the arts.

Among the distinguished Special Forces veterans gathered for the event was retired Air Force Special Operations Col. Roland Guidry, founder of the Joint Allied Special Operations Center (JASOC). Guidry flew the first C-130 aircraft in the failed Iran hostage rescue mission, known as Operation Eagle Claw, in April, 1980. Guidry's book, "The Guts to Try," summed up well the message he conveyed to the gathering, Saturday morning.

Other Special Forces members present included retired Army Lt. Col. Johnny Raymond, who chaired the committee responsible for organizing the event; Col. Dale Gaudet, the last commander of Company D, the Breaux Bridge unit of the 20th SFG, which was deactivated in 1972; and 2nd Lt. Robert Romero, who was a featured speaker for the event.

The keynote address was given by SFG Battalion Operations Warrant Officer Jean P. Guidry, a Breaux Bridge native assigned to Eglin Air Force Base in Pensacola, Fla. Guidry noted that while U.S. conventional forces are being drawn down around the world, Special Operations numbers continue to steadily climb upward due to the unique and ever increasing challenges involved in counterterrorism. Like so many others, Guidry observed with amazement the large number of Special Forces members coming out of Breaux Bridge.

Guidry noted the close ties among this unassuming group of professionals devoted to the security of our great nation.

Some of the motorcycle clubs in attendance were the Patriot Guard Riders, Marine Corps League Riders, Special-Ops Riders, Combat Vet Riders and the Special Forces Riders, D.C.

At the conclusion of the ceremony a buffet lunch was held at Buck & Johnny's Restaurant. Retired Sgt. Maj. Lennet Guidry led attendees in a Special Forces prayer and retired Lt. Col. Ken Lanzalaco presided over a POW-MIA ceremony.





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See this video of **Fred Patin**, for vetsans day, about 25 years ago.

<http://youtu.be/RmTcxtMozIU>



Dear Sir,

Thank you so much for putting me in touch with **Lory Curtis**, who kindly got me in touch with Chris Hill. We are exchanging info back and forth! Amazing! It turns out his dad is on many famous war time photos of the 504th PIR which I would have never known had it not been for your kind act to pass my email on to Lory.

MANY MANY THANKS!

Frank van Lunteren

**COMPANY MORNING REPORT**      ENDING 21 August 1944  
2400 (DAY) (MONTH) (YEAR)

STATION Leicester 1 1/4 mi SE WFC822 England  
 ORGANIZATION Co A 504th Parachute Inf Inf  
(CO, BATT, ETC.) (PARACHUTE CO.) (ARM OR SERVICE)

SERIAL NUMBER	NAME	GRADE	CODE
0-373323	Hill, Willard J.	1st Lt	9
Reld of pri dy as Asst Plt Ldr & asst 4210			
pri dy as Asst Post Exch O 19 Aug 44. 19/08			



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

This photo was in [MailCall 2141](#):



**Sgt. Joe Lobit**, a 13th Airborne Paratrooper and veteran of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment with his collection of German knives that he had acquired while serving in Germany during the final months of the war. The photo was taken in August 1945 at Camp Pittsburg, an embarkation camp in France prior to the Soldier's departure for home.

Gilles G

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I recently found this internet discussion trying to identify the various knives in the photo: - BB

From:  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryPorn/comments/1vecl/an\\_american\\_soldier\\_of\\_the\\_517th\\_parachute/?sort=old](https://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryPorn/comments/1vecl/an_american_soldier_of_the_517th_parachute/?sort=old)

Could someone identify each of daggers & bayonets? Especially the one he is holding, as it looks badass.

From left to right: looks like an m1884/98 III, used on the kar 98k , I can't find anything about the folding knife, the 3rd from left and second from right both look to be SS daggers, I've never seen one like the one he's holding it looks more like a WW1 bayonet but I'm not sure, the other two also look to be m1884/98 III's.

Actually both the ones you said SS are actually SA, one has the eagle gone but you can still see the SA button at the top of the dagger. The one in his hands is a NCO RAD hewer.



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My mistake i just assumed it would be an SS dagger, Because of the date in the title i didn't think SA daggers would still be as common in 1945.

They had made so many of them that it is estimated that pre 1943 there was in the range of 3 to 4 million of them out there. They were also made after the war out of parts, the one the the left without the eagle might be a parts dagger since it is missing the eagle (and doesn't looked to be dug out which was common) and the blade looks to be on backwards, since GI's wanted them and they would trade food for them.

Well I've learned something new today, thanks for the for the info.

Russian site says folding knife is a Navajo Folding Knife: [http://www.icollector.com/Navajo-Folding-Knife\\_i8682466](http://www.icollector.com/Navajo-Folding-Knife_i8682466)

jonesy is right, although I think the one he's holding is just another one of the many silly more ceremonial knives the nazis made.

Here's one of the bayonets, and this is how it is affixed to the rifle. The rightmost one has a bakelite handle while the other two are wooden.

It is a NCO RAD hewer, it was part of the dress uniform and was ceremonial (non sharpened blade) , but funny enough if you ever see one in person you will almost always find that they have damage on the back of the quillion since the hewer is heavy enough to be used to hammer in small nails.

Might be worth posting to /r/knives - they are pretty ace at identifying!

The small knife, second from the right says "alles fur deutschland" or "all for Germany" in case anyone was wondering.

The blade hes holding is shaped like a scimitar, different from every Hitler youth knife and German bayonet I've seen.

What about that ring ?

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A supsize version of the knife photo is at: <http://i.imgur.com/52fC6ro.jpg>

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"We stood on one bridge in the Hurtgen Forest where 900 Americans went across and only 150 came back. It is unbelievably emotional to be at such places. But the high point of the trip for both of us was to stand in the village square in Nice in the same place where Jim marched so long ago."

Pat Casey

## Don Boxmeyer

(continued)

trooper and do these dangerous things, she had a conviction. But he was ready to go."

After his introduction to war in Italy, Jim Birder's unit parachuted into southern France in August 1944 and was in liberated Nice when the French celebrated Armistice Day (now Veterans Day in America) that November. A news photo of Jim marching through the town square with his troops ran not only in French newspapers, but was reprinted in American papers with a story that said, "It was I Company of the 517th that stole the show ... in Nice when Capt. Birder's boys marched through the streets of the Riviera city in a parade honoring the French soldiers who have been killed in this war."

"We went back to that city, to that square, where Jim and his boys marched," says Pat, a retired headmaster of St. Thomas Academy in Mendota Heights. "The buildings are all still there. It has not changed. It was unbelievably moving to be where he walked 61 years ago."

"The whole trip was inspiring in that way. We felt the presence of Jim and all the men all the way along. I was only 13 or 14 during the war, and can still remember following those battles in the news."

During one of those battles, the famous Battle of the Bulge, Jim earned his promotion from 1st lieutenant to captain by directing the capture of 42 enemy soldiers. He would later be posthumously awarded the Silver Star and the French Croix de Guerre for his actions.

They fought across France, in the mountains, in the fields, in small villages such as Col de Braus, Trois Pointe, Herrumont and Sospel. During the bitter winter of 1944, his unit was in the Hurtgen Forest in Germany, thrust into a terrible campaign that would come to be known as the "Green Hell of the Hurtgen," or simply the "Death Factory," where some U.S. Army regiments actually suffered 100 percent losses.

Terry always has wanted to know more about her older brother's war, and came upon his name and photo during a search of the Internet a couple



JOE ODEN, PIONEER PRESS

Pat and Terry Casey recently returned from a three-week trip across Europe tracing the path of Terry's brother, Capt. Jim Birder, who was killed during the last days of World War II. The Caseys, who live in West St. Paul, display a photo of Birder and the combat medals he was awarded for his actions.



COURTESY PHOTO

Jim Birder is shown in his St. Thomas Academy graduation picture from 1940. He attended the University of Notre Dame until he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 and became a paratrooper.

517th Regiment, where I talked with his old executive officer and his best friend, and I even got a letter from a woman who served in the military and who dated Jim before he shipped out to Europe. All this because of the 517th Web site."

Once in Europe, Terry and Pat were led onto the battlefields and forests by helpful and sympathetic guides from France and Belgium. They found the Hurtgen area almost unchanged from the war years, a vast expanse of steep ravines and rocky crags all densely forested and honeycombed with the

Germany, that on Feb. 7, 1945, Capt. Birder slipped off an icy ridge under enemy fire and landed on what was called a Schu mine, a small, anti-personnel mine designed to blow the legs off soldiers. Jim's sergeant and good friend, a man who now lives in Fayetteville, N.C., told Terry this year that it took several hours for medics to get to Jim during the heat of a ferocious battle. He died en route to an aid station.

It was the last battle that the by-then decimated 517th would fight. The unit was broken up shortly after that, its members sent to other fighting regiments.

But Jim's name still comes up, Terry learned, when the 517th reunites.

"My mother woke up out of her sleep at about that time (of his death)," Terry recalls, "and said she felt Jim's presence, that he was with her. After we got the telegram, after we found out he was gone, she was never the same. She kind of lost it after that."

This trip for the Caseys finally brought closure for Terry. They walked where he walked, right up to the end, to Bergstein.

"Throughout the trip we had wonderful guides," Pat says. "The Belgian people have not forgotten, and some have devoted their lives to remembering that war. They are unbelievably grateful and respectful for all the men who died in it."

Terry moved with her family

the College of St. Catherine. She then became a Sister of St. Joseph for 14 years before her marriage to Pat. Before her retirement, Terry taught at Derham Hall and Visitation School. Pat, in addition to his time at St. Thomas Academy, served as principal at Grace High School (now Totino-Grace) in Fridley and Benilde High School in Minneapolis (now Benilde-St. Margaret's in St. Louis Park).

Jim was buried with 20,000 of his brothers in the Margraten Cemetery in Holland in 1945. After the war, all but 8,300 of them were brought back to the United States for burial, and Jim now rests in a family plot in Resurrection Cemetery in Mendota Heights.

"We stood on one bridge in the Hurtgen Forest where 900 Americans went across and only 150 came back," Pat says. "It is unbelievably emotional to be at such places. But the high point of the trip for both of us was to stand in the village square in Nice in the same place where Jim marched so long ago."

The adjutant general's citation for the Silver Star that Jim earned for action at Manhay, Belgium, in December 1944 reads, in part, "Capt. Birder's courage, coolness under fire, and vigor were an inspiration to all the men in his command."

"Capt. Birder was killed in a subsequent action."

St. Paul Pioneer Press (MN)

November 10, 2005





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

## *West Coast Mini-Reunion*

### **2016 517th PRCT PALM SPRINGS REUNION**

**March 7-11, 2016  
Palm Springs, California**



Anahata Retreat/Lodge Hot Mineral Springs Pool and Spa here we come!

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 guess under \$250.00 for your room for the whole week, food usually \$150.00 for all meals at the resort, excluding when we go out.

**To reserve a room please contact me before February 25**

**Karen Wallace**  
66295 Hwy 20  
Bend, OR 97703  
5419482486  
[karenwski@gmail.com](mailto:karenwski@gmail.com)





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## Military History

### Moe Berg: Catcher and spy

By Nick Acocella

Special to ESPN.com

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*"He [Moe Berg] bluffs his way up onto the roof of the hospital, the tallest building in Tokyo at the time. And from underneath his kimono he pulls out a movie camera. He proceeds to take a series of photos panning the whole setting before him, which includes the harbor, the industrial sections of Tokyo, possibly munitions factories and things like that. Then he puts the camera back under his kimono and leaves the hospital with these films," says Nicholas Dawidoff, a Berg biographer.*

Moe Berg has long enjoyed a reputation as the most shadowy player in the history of baseball. Earning more notoriety for being a frontline spy than for being a backup catcher, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction in Berg's undercover career. Just Berg being a spy begs the question: How much of the fiction might have been used as cover?

In 1934, five years before he retired as a player, Berg made his second trip to Japan as part of a traveling major league All-Star team. One might wonder what the seldom-used catcher, a .251 hitter that season, was doing playing with the likes of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig.

Berg, who spoke Japanese, took home movies of the Tokyo skyline that were used in the planning of General Jimmy Doolittle's 1942 bombing raids on the Japanese capital. The U.S. government wrote a letter to Berg, thanking him for the movies. Biographies, magazine articles and word of mouth have elevated this story into the stuff of legend.

The only utility player to be the subject of three biographies, few of his accomplishments came in the batter's box. It was Berg whom St. Louis Cardinals scout Mike Gonzalez was describing when he coined the phrase "good field, no hit" in the early 1920s.

In his 15 major league seasons, in which he played just 662 games, Berg was a lifetime .243 hitter. He started out as a slick-fielding utility infielder before the Chicago White Sox in 1927 moved him to catcher, where he then found his niche as a substitute backstop, filling that role until he retired in 1939.

In only one year did the 6-foot-1, 185-pound Berg appear in more than 100 games; he played in fewer than 50 games in 12 seasons. But he was a brilliant scholar, picking up degrees from Princeton and Columbia Law School and studying philosophy at the Sorbonne.

His linguistic skills inspired this observation by a teammate: "He can speak seven languages, but he can't hit in any of them."

Berg was a hit with people, though. He had a reputation for charm and erudition that brought him introductions to powerful people, such as the Rockefeller family, who ordinarily did not associate with ballplayers.

Morris Berg was born in a cold-water tenement on East 121st Street in Manhattan on March 2, 1902, to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents -- Bernard, a druggist, and Rose. The family moved across the Hudson River to Newark, N.J., in 1906.

At seven, Berg began playing baseball for a Methodist Church team under the pseudonym Runt Wolfe. He later starred at Barringer High School. From there, it was on to Princeton, where he majored in modern languages and played shortstop on the baseball team. He and a teammate, also a linguist, would communicate on the field in Latin.



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After graduating magna cum laude in 1923, Berg was signed by Brooklyn, for whom he played shortstop and batted .186 in 49 games. After spending the winter at the Sorbonne in Paris, he returned to the United States and played two seasons in the minors.

A student at Columbia Law School, in 1926 he joined the White Sox, who had bought his contract from Reading of the International League. Berg became a catcher by accident the next season. In August 1927, after three Chicago receivers were injured in a matter of days, he volunteered for the job.

A deft handler of pitchers and possessor of a rifle arm, by 1929 he was the White Sox's regular catcher. He hit a career-high .288 in 106 games and received two votes in balloting for the American League's Most Valuable Player.

Unfortunately for Berg, the following year in spring training he suffered a knee injury and spent the rest of his career (with the Cleveland Indians, Washington Senators and Boston Red Sox after Chicago) as a bench warmer. When he called it quits at 37, he had just 441 hits in 1,812 at-bats, with only six home runs and 206 runs batted in.

After two years as a Red Sox coach, Berg left baseball on Jan. 14, 1942, the same day his father died. Bernard Berg always regarded his son's choice of a career as a waste of a fine intellect. Moe's love of the game - and of the travel and social hobnobbing it afforded him -- was a matter of contention between them to the end.

It is at this point, just after the start of the United States' entry into World War II, that Berg's life became the subject of much speculation. Nelson Rockefeller gave him a job with the Office of Inter-American Affairs that allowed him to travel through South and Central America studying the health and fitness of the population.

He parlayed that post into becoming an officer in the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA, in 1943.

Berg, according to one biography, was prone to blunders: getting caught trying to infiltrate an aircraft factory during his training, dropping his gun into a fellow passenger's lap, and being recognized by wearing his O.S.S.-issue watch.

Despite these mistakes, Berg was well-regarded enough to have been chosen to carry out one of the O.S.S.' more ambitious endeavors - a plot to possibly assassinate Werner Heisenberg, the head of Nazi Germany's atom-bomb project. Berg, who spoke German fluently, was sent in December 1944 to Zurich to attend a lecture by Heisenberg. Berg's assessment of the situation was that Germany was not close to having a nuclear bomb, and there was never an attempt to kill Heisenberg.

Another story involving Berg's spying career came at the end of the war, when, while traveling through Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia with some other agents, he produced a letter with a big red star on it when asked for credentials. The Americans lacked any authorization, and supposedly what Berg showed the Soviet soldiers was a copy of the Texaco Oil Co. letterhead.

After being forced out of the spy business in the late forties, Berg didn't hold a regular job. A bachelor, he often freeloaded off friends and relatives, especially his brother Sam, who once sent Moe two eviction notices to get him out of his house. After living with Sam for 17 years, he moved in with his sister Ethel for the final eight years of his life.

To the end, however, Berg remained a dandy.

In 1960, out of financial necessity, he was prepared to break his lifelong silence about his supposed exploits and agreed to write a book. However, the project collapsed when the editor glowingly praised the prospective author's movies on the mistaken assumption that he was about to sign a contract with Moe of The Three Stooges.

Berg died at 70 on May 29, 1972 in Belleville, N.J., of an abdominal aortic aneurysm. Ethel took his ashes to Israel. To this day, no one knows where his remains are buried.

In death, as in life, Moe Berg was a mystery.



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## Administrivia

If you miss any MailCalls, they are all available online at <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/>

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

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

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