



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2316
March 20, 2016

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

73 Years Ago- Camp Toccoa, GA

According to **Lou Walsh** in 1975:



Did you know that:

- That when activated on **15 March 1943**, the aggregate strength of the 517th PIR was 11... all officers?
- The first fillers arrived at Camp Toccoa for 'consideration' of assignment to the 517 BEFORE the enlisted cadre reported for duty ... and the officers cooked and served their first meal!
- The 517th was the first parachute unit to use a Mock-Up tower as a 'test of intention' prior to acceptance for assignment?
- As a direct result of this, the 517th was the first (and only) unit to have entire battalions go through jump training without a jump refusal. Of course, another direct result was that it took 'forever and a day' to fill up the regiment. I was reprimanded and the 3rd Bn had to fill up at Benning.
- The 517 was the first unit to use the steel helmet during jump training ... and thereafter, all used them.
- The Regiment was made up of pretty young fellows ... at one point when the officer strength was 55, Ike Walton, who is a West Point classmate of mine and I had, together, more years of service (18) than all the rest of the officers.
- The 517 was the first Parachute Regimental Combat Team to be so designated

From: http://517prct.org/reunions/1975_fort_bragg_nc/1975_reunion_booklet.pdf



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MailCall News

Way back when, when we first built the 517th web site, we stated that eight (8) soldiers from the 517th went on to become generals in the Army. But after asking many times, no one could name more than seven Generals:

1. (4 Star) **General Melvin Zais** – Commander of the 3rd Battalion
2. (3 Star) **Lieutenant General Richard J. Seitz** – Commander of the 2nd Battalion
3. (2 Star) **Major General Sidney Michael Marks** – Commander C Company, 1st Battalion
4. (2 Star) **Major General Louis Walsh Jr.** – Commander of the 517th PIR at Camp Toccoa
5. (2 Star) **Major General John Henry Neiler** – 1st Lt with the 3rd Battalion
6. (1 Star) **Brigadier General David E. Grange Jr.** – PFC with the 2nd Battalion
7. (1 Star) **Brigadier General Richard J. Eaton** - Corporal with the 517th, 1st Battalion

I just ran across a note in an old 596th Wings newsletter in which **Charlie Pugh**, the editor, listed some of the Generals and included John Kinzer, whom I had never heard of:

8. (1 Star) **Brigadier General John Marvin Kinzer** – 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion

From: http://www.517prct.org/documents/596th_newsletters/Wings_July_1982.pdf

I didn't find too much about **John Kinzer**, except for one obituary and his gravestone at Arlington National Cemetery:

During World War II, Mr. Kinzer served as a major in a parachute artillery battalion. He received many decorations for his service, including the Legion of Merit and the Distinguished Service Medal. He was the chief of staff, plans and

policy, in Naples, Italy, during the 1960s.

Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth "Betty" Boucher Kinzer of Gainesville; a daughter, Jeanne Marie Drewsen of New



Mr. Kinzer

York, N.Y., two sons, John Francis Kinzer of Burke, Va., and Daniel Marvin Kinzer of El Segundo, Calif.; two sisters, Ruth Hamilton of Umatilla and Alice Groves of Lady Lake; and seven grandchildren.

John Marvin Kinzer

John Marvin Kinzer of Gainesville died Sunday at North Florida Rehabilitation and Special Care Center. He was 80.

Mr. Kinzer was a retired University of Florida assistant to the vice president.

He was born in Jenkins, Ky., and moved here from Naples, Italy, in 1970.

Mr. Kinzer was a member of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and served in the U.S. Army for 30 years until he retired as a brigadier general.

He received a bachelor's degree in agronomy from UF and a master's degree in international affairs from George Washington Universi-





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Hello,

I am looking for information about **General John Neiler**, HQ 3rd Bt. His wife has recently given me several of his and her uniforms, spanning from WWII to the mid 70's.

To thank her, I am going to build a shadowbox for his medals and insignia, but I would like to find pictures of him during WWII. She does not have any photos of him from that time.

I have looked a little on the internet including your site, but have only found a couple.

Any stories would be good as well.

Thanks,

Ben Arnold

Hi Ben,

We have a bunch of info on John Henry Neiler, but no WW2 photos yet.

The most stuff and a couple of stories are in

<http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/2123.pdf>

And a page from the 1975 reunion:

http://517prct.org/reunions/1975_fort_bragg_nc/1975_reunion_booklet.pdf

But if you've used the search function on the web site, you've probably found those already.

Update: I did find one group picture of the 3rd Battalion at Camp Mackall, in which Neiler was identified by **Howard Hensleigh**.

From: http://www.517prct.org/photos/3rd_battalion.htm

I Hope this helps.

Bob Barrett

Hello Bob,

That looks like him.

She will appreciate anything that is out there.

Thanks,

Ben





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Subject: Re: **Major General John Neiler**

Yes it does. I showed this picture to Mrs. Neiler today and she loved it. She immediately picked him out.

Another question, I have his M42s but the patches have been removed. I would have figured that he would have the 82nd patch on his right shoulder, but the evidence remaining shows what I think was an arched airborne tab with a round patch underneath. Any ideas what this would have been?

Thanks,

Ben

Hi, Ben.

If the uniform is from training and WW2, the only round patch I can think of is the 17th airborne. The 517th PIR was part of the 17th during their training and Camp Toccoa.



I haven't seen many pictures of 517th men wearing that patch, but I'll look around. I know there are some.

I found an example at: http://517prct.org/photos/gerald_nelson.htm

I thought the patches were on the left shoulder, but I don't know what the rules are



Pvt. Gerald Nelson (HQ Co, 1st Battalion)
with 17th Airborne patch

PS: During the service in Europe, the 517th was primarily independent, being attached to various units as needed. At the end of the war they were attached to the 13th.

Also FYI, the 517th patch was never officially approved by the Army. During the war, the 517th logo was designed by **Dick Spencer**, and any patches worn during the war were custom made, to my knowledge.

Bob Barrett



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I was mistaken, the patch was on the left shoulder.

Do you know if the ever wore the 82nd patch?

Thanks for the information. Mrs. Neiler enjoys hearing this also. Yesterday, she let me borrow her copy of Paratroopers' Odyssey. She didn't know she had a copy until yesterday.

Ben Arnold

Excerpt from: 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, Turner Publishing 1998

BATTLING CHUTISTS

War's No Fun, But 517th

Is Ready For Any Job

by **Iva H. (Cy) Peterman**

The 517th was enjoying a breather when Von Rundstedt's rampage began; they piled into trucks and rushed to Soissons in case the Germans should penetrate that quarter, but before they disembarked their orders were changed seven times. Eventually they were thrown against the 116th Panzers, as part of the American 3rd Armored front.

"It was rough going. It was with the 3rd Battalion, they took us from Malmedy for a night attack on Manhay, we fought everything, including American tanks with German crews. Our own planes dive-bombed us, our own artillery fell on the boys when they got too far front, the town was lousy with snipers. And once we were five and a half miles in advance, with both flanks exposed," Spencer said.

Near Trois Pants, things were so confused that **Lieutenant John H. Neiler**, demolitions officer and regimental staffer (they combine and improvise in screwy fashion in the 517th), son of Mr. and Mrs. C.S. Neiler, of 600 Napoleon Street, Johnstown, PA, went forward with another man to blow up a bridge. It wasn't a Hemingway bridge episode; they merely took explosives and walked down the road, hoping for the best. Arriving at a river bank allegedly in our hands at that point, Neiler was surprised to see a group of unfamiliar characters.

"These guys look like Jerries - must be prisoners!" he remarked.

"We are Jerries, only you are the prisoners!" came the response, the English having a distinctly Teutonic flavor.

Lieutenant Neiler promptly reached for his .45 The German shouted "Nix!" and fired. The lieutenant's helmet flew into the air.

"In the half-light, Neiler dropped into the snow and began firing at the group, while bullets spattered near us. Another bullet grazed his head, parting his hair, but drew no blood, as he backed into the dusk and escaped," **Spencer** reported.

The Johnstown lad happened early upon the minefield when the 517th joined in the attack on the Roer River dams and like **Lieutenant Joseph Novik**, of Tarrytown, NY, he said it was the biggest and most intricate ever encountered.



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Here is one more Neiler story, from **Tom McAvoy** from an old MailCall (<http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/546.html>):

... Were you able to get in touch with **John Neiler**? He was 3rd Btn. S-2 Officer in Italy, Then after the jump into France **Capt Dearing** (the regt. S-2 officer was injured and Neiler was moved up to Regt. S-2. Being in the reserve he made Major General before he retired. A little story if you want to add it O.K. We were on a maneuver in No. Carolina (the blue Army always out-numbers the red Army by 5-to 1) We were the red Army and was being run over by the Blue Army I was driving for Capt Dearing, we came to a long driveway leading up to a farm house Capt Dearing says lets go up that Driveway Tom, I said O.K. Capt. but I don't think we will be able to get out of there. Dearing says take it anyway, So I did At the end of the driveway Dearing jumps out of the Jeep and runs away from the enemy, leaving me stranded with the jeep. I found I had somehow lost the rear drive to the jeep and only had front wheel drive. The enemy captures me and place 3-4 other of our guys in the jeep and a sergeant from the blue army, and tells me we are taking you back to a prison of war camp. We go back out the long driveway and down the main road, And an umpire steps out of the side of the road. flags us down an ask where we are going. Here it is **Lt. John Neiler** with his umpire insignia on. He tells the sergeant to go back to his outfit and he will take us back to the prison of war camp, The sergeant jumps out salutes Neiler and goes back to his outfit, Neiler takes us down the road and turns us loose to rejoin our outfit. Then Dearing wants to know how I got out of that fix, I was afraid if I told him The Commander **Col. Walsh** was sitting there would get Neiler in trouble, so I said I would never tell. That might have been my swan song as for as Capt Dearing was concerned.

Tom McAvoy



Major General John H. Neiler

[MailCall 2123](#) has **John Neiler**'s biography and obituary. John was a Ph.D. and leading nuclear physicist when he wasn't in the army.



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Hello, I present my name Angelin Tauveron I am French, and collector of the 1st ABTF and especially 517PRCT. I make videos on uniforms, and the history of this unit (with english subtitles) . I give you the links of my latest videos on the 517th, you can share them on your website if desired (this would be a great joy and a great honor for me)

Thank you very much for reading this message, sorry for my English,

Angelin.

1st video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7sMYRIWDC4>



2nd video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREmda4KqR4>

Angelin Tauveron 517attack83@gmail.com



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RE: Re: **Joe Bail** contacting **Harris Miller**

Hi Bob,

Thank you so much! Harris sent me an email which I passed along to Grandpa Joe. And then Grandpa Joe wrote up a message for me to send to Harris because Grandpa Joe doesn't have email.

How exciting for them to reconnect after so long!

~**Jennifer Walker**

Bob, the last time I went to the Vet's home, one of them asked me how many members are part of your newsletter, I told him that I would ask. You don't have to put this in the newsletter, it's up to you. also that helicopter landing on that shack is unbelievable. What a guy!!!!

Anne Justice

Hi Ann,

It's just a small newsletter. Currently sent to about 365 members of the 517th family - troopers, family, friends from the US and Europe.

We used to send the printed Thunderbolt to about 1300 people, mostly troopers around 2003, but sadly, we have lost touch with most of them in the last decade.

Bob Barrett

Thanks, Bob. I'll tell him. I am not sure why he wanted to know, perhaps wondering how much support there still is. But with all they go through sometimes, i always try to help or do what I can for them. It is almost time for my next visit.

I will say they are the most entertaining group of guys that I've ever met. When I read the junk in the paper about all that has gone on in that ADM, it angers me, but makes me more determined.

Many blessings, Bob, for all that you do, you are another light out there on the landscape.

P.S. I recently showed a man how to get his dad's records from the military. His father passed a few years ago, and never spoke about anything. He was a gunner. You don't have to put the rest of my email in the paper, unless you want to. But might you ask if anybody knew a 'Charles Howe', All he knows is that his father was a gunner

Thanks much, and hi to everyone.

Anne Justice



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In Memorium – Marshall “Mark” Baird – A Company



I was proud to attend **Marshall "Mark" Baird's** memorial last Saturday. The memorial was held at the Oracle Community Center in Oracle, Arizona. I was so honored to get to know Mark the last part of his life, and always considered him a man of high integrity. After listening to family members talk about Mark, that was very much confirmed. He has passed on to rejoin his wife at what I'm sure will be a ranch in heaven like the one he had on this earth. He will be missed by many friends and family. What a great guy!

Tim Curtis
Son of **Harland "Bud" Curtis**





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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
- 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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