



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

## MailCall No. 2343

January 8, 2017

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

## *Donald Boatright, G Company*

It saddens me to announce the passing of **Cpl. Donald E. Boatright**.

July 11, 1924 - January 6, 2017.

Papaboat to many.

Corbin Camp



**Donald E. Boatright**

1924 - 2017

G Company, 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment

May you have a safe landing, Don !

From:

<https://www.facebook.com/ForgottenParatroopers/?ref=ts>



## MailCall News

<http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/archivists-still-piecing-together-veterans-records-damaged-1973-fire-st-louis#stream/0>

### Archivists still piecing together veterans records damaged by 1973 fire in St. Louis

By MARY DELACH LEONARD • NOV 10, 2016 - St. Louis Public Radio



Preservation lab technician Rebecca Thorn pieces together fragments of a fire-damaged record at the National Personnel Records Center.

*Mary Delach Leonard | St. Louis Public Radio*

Archivist Marta O'Neill was standing inside a warehouse-sized storage bay at the cavernous [National Personnel Records Center](#), just off interstate 270 in north St. Louis County.

Nearly 60 million individual military personnel records are stored at the site, but this storage bay is unique. It houses only B-files: the 6.5 million records salvaged from the [1973 fire](#) at the center's old facility on Page Avenue. That fire destroyed the records of 18 million veterans who served in World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

The surviving documents are brittle and sometimes moldy, damaged by both fire and the water that was poured on to douse it.

O'Neill opened a box of charred service records.

"As you can see, some of them have scorching on their edges," she said. "Some of them look mold-damaged, and some are distorted or warped because of the water."

Photographs aren't allowed in here, but it's an impressive sight. This space, one of two storage bays devoted to B-files, is capable of holding 250,000 cubic feet of records. Cardboard boxes are stacked row on row. There are 15 levels of shelves on the first floor and seven levels of shelves on each of two catwalks above. The temperature is kept between a chilly 35 and 45 degrees to help prevent further deterioration.

O'Neill heads the records center's preservation lab, which employs 15 technicians. She said they operate like a MASH unit, doing triage on the nearly 300 requests received daily for these burnt records. Often, they're from veterans who need documentation to qualify for VA benefits, like health care. Or, they're from families who want to bury their veterans in a national cemetery.



Records that survived the fire 43 years ago at the National Personnel Records Center were charred and water-damaged.

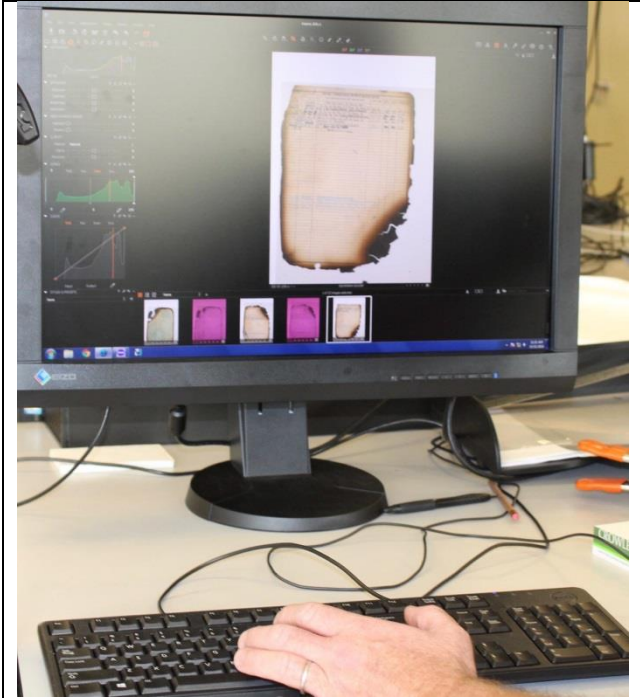
*Credit National Personnel Records Center*



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Some records are surprisingly intact.

“If it’s in fairly good condition, and it just needs a light brushing to get light mold off, we’ll do that and send it to a reference technician to respond to the veteran,” she said. “If it’s in really bad shape, we might have to do a lot of treatment work.



Technician Tom Schmidt uses infrared images to reveal words on blackened ash.

*Credit Mary Delach Leonard | St. Louis Public Radio*

As Schmidt adjusted the exposure, clarity and contrast of the image, the word “Kentucky” appeared in the ash. That could be important information for the requester.

“There are veterans’ lives and livelihoods that depend on the work that we do,” Schmidt said. “I put myself in the place of the servicemen. I feel that it is very important that they have what was promised to them.”

When Schmidt started working at the records center in 2003, this technology wasn’t available.

“Who knows what future technology will come down the line and with the use of computers and digital imaging what we might be able to come up with in the future,” he said.

The technicians can dab away dirt and mold with chemically treated sponges. They remove bits of ash with a medical vacuum used by surgeons. They mend tears and flatten pages so they can be put into flexible Mylar sleeves that can be easily photocopied or scanned.

Forty-three years after the fire, they are still discovering new technologies that can help.

On this morning, preservation technician Tom Schmidt was using digital photography to enhance damaged records belonging to a Korean War Army veteran.

“This is a file that has survived somewhat, but there are large portions of the paper that have been blackened, and you cannot see the text,” he said, while scanning a document. “But being that the ink burns at a different temperature than the paper, we’re able to draw that information out using infrared technology.”



Preservation lab technician Tom Schmidt scans damaged documents at the National Personnel Records Center.

*Credit Mary Delach Leonard | St. Louis Public Radio*



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That's why it's important to preserve the documents, even if they are unreadable today, the archivists say. Before the records center moved to this building in 2011, these files were stored in a warehouse that had limited environmental control.

The National Personnel Records Center is part of the federal National Archives and Records Administration and serves as the central repository of personnel records for the military and civil service employees of the U.S. government. Civilian records are housed in a [limestone cave in Valmeyer, Ill.](#)

"We're the only preservation lab outside of the D.C. area," O'Neill said. "The D.C. lab does a lot of early historic materials. They're responsible for the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence. We're the only lab that deals with burnt records and mold-damaged and water-damaged documents."

Unlike today's digital military files, these old paper files often contain photographs and personal letters.



Technician Marie Taylor examines a fire-damaged military file at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.

*Credit Mary Delach Leonard / St. Louis Public Radio*

Technician Marie Taylor, who's 25, says she's developed a connection to these soldiers who served their country decades ago.

"They're not just documents," said Taylor. "There was somebody who lived this out. I'm doing my best to preserve that. To remember that."

She was cleaning the fragile documents of a soldier taken prisoner by the Japanese during World War II. It was requested by the DPAA, the federal agency that recovers the remains of missing members of the U.S. military. The file includes official telegrams and also letters from the soldier's family.

"What's interesting but also very sad about this file is that these parents got word from the Red Cross that he did die in one of the camps from dysentery. But even after that they didn't give up hope. There are letters in this record where the mother kept saying, 'We might have heard his voice on the radio.' They kept trying. They didn't give up hope," she said. "This entire record is heartbreaking."

Scott Levins, director of the records center, said that staff members appreciate hearing from veterans they've helped.

"One of the first emails I got today was a thank-you from an 88-year-old Korean War veteran who was looking for his medals," Levins said.

The veteran wanted to thank the employee who had assisted him in documenting his service. He included a photograph of himself, wearing the service medals he'd earned 60 years ago.

Levins shared the following facts about the National Personnel Records Center:

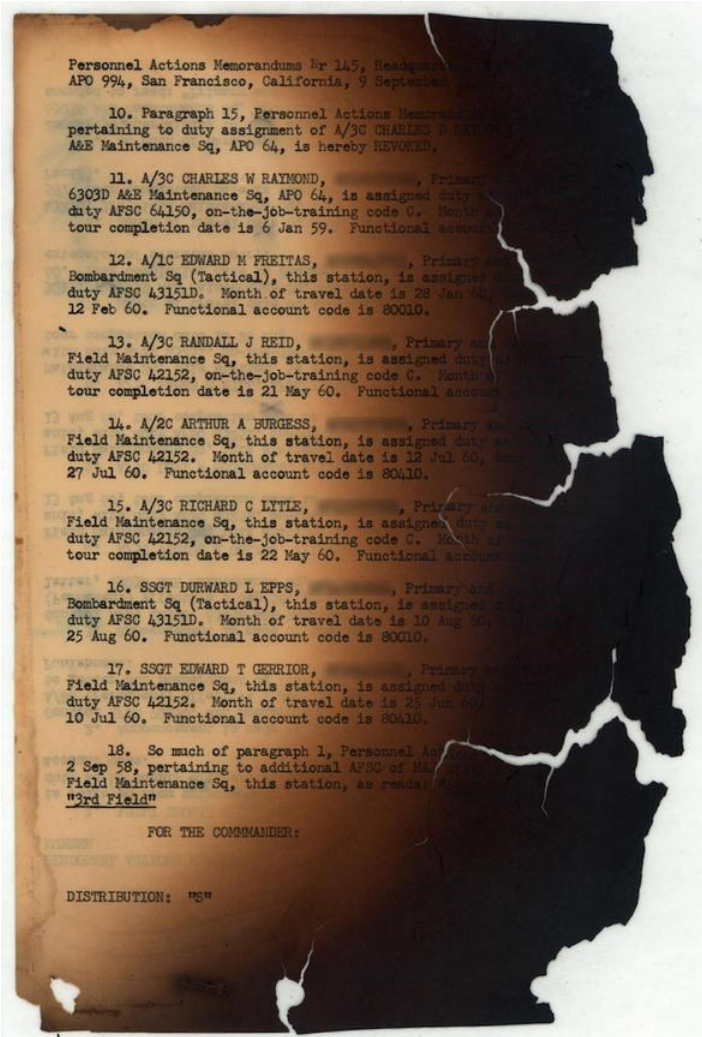
- The center has paper and microfilm records dating back to the Spanish American War.
- Between 4,000 and 5,000 requests are received every day. About 45 percent of those requests are for a DD Form 214, a one-page summary of military service that is needed to qualify for benefits.



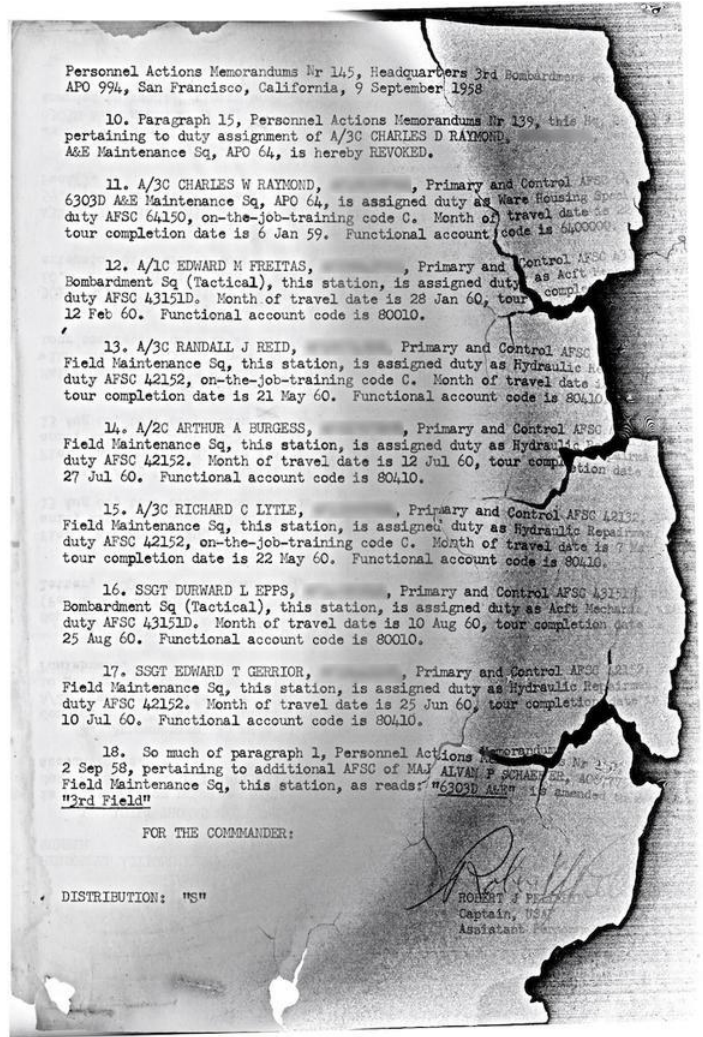
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- Military records are private and are not released to the public without the consent of the veteran. Records are considered archival 62 years after the veteran dies or leaves the military. Archival records are available to the public.
- Veterans who want to access their files can find details on the [center's website](#). There is no charge for the service.
- If a veteran's service records were lost in the 1973 fire, attempts are made to reconstruct information by using records from other agencies, including the Veterans Administration.

Follow Mary Delach Leonard on Twitter @MaryDLeonard



Without digital enhancing



With digital enhancing

This example shows how a charred record can be digitally enhanced.



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## 1944 Bulge Recollections – John Strojan, Harry Boothe

12-20-2016

Dear Miriam and Bob,

I am sending you the same info to answer in part your request (M) regarding my background and to your (B) plea for 517<sup>th</sup> vets to submit personal stories.

I haven't sent out any Xmas cards as I have no up to date addresses on who is still on the 517 Association roster.

Is it possible to put my 1999 Xmas message on MailCall?

Best wishes to you and your families for 2017 and our gratitude for all you have done for the 517<sup>th</sup> PRCT. You are awesome.

Sincerely,

**John J. Strojan**

"I" Co, 3<sup>rd</sup> Batt

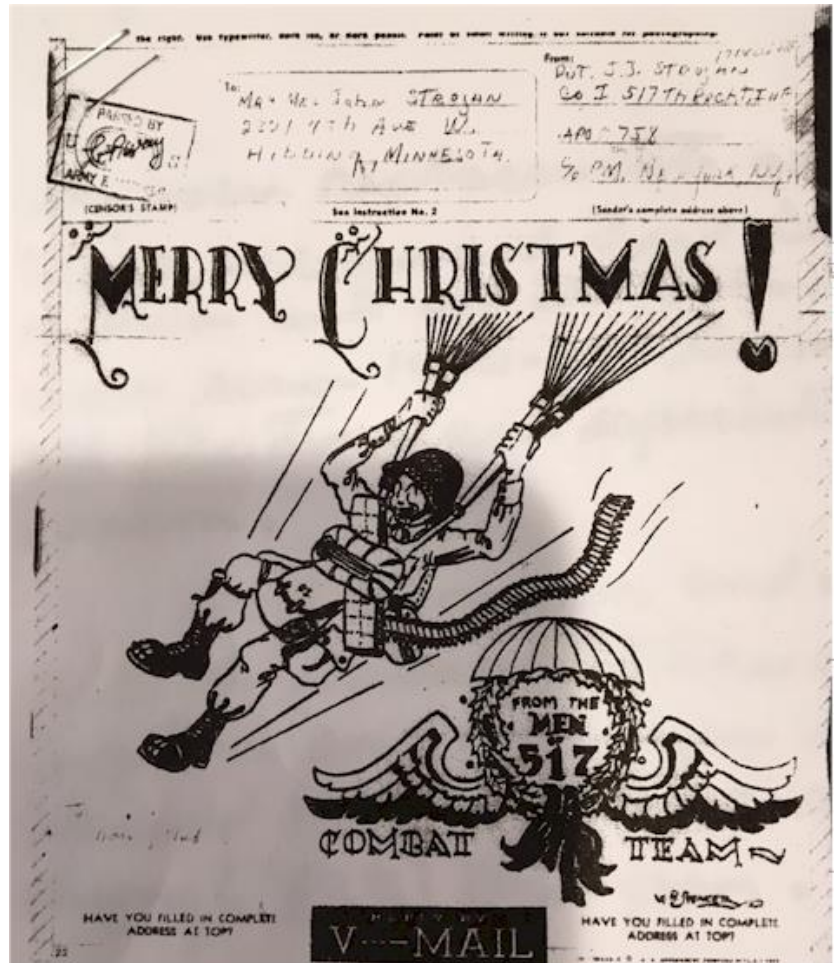
Dec 7 1999

'Tis the season to be jolly though I can't help but think back to Christmas time 55 years ago as a member of "I" Co. 517 PRCT. I sent this V-Mail to my parents and sister from Soissons in early December 1944 just after we arrived from Southern France. The artist who created the 517<sup>th</sup> greeting was Lt. R. Spencer.

Soon after Dec 16, 1944 we were trucked into Belgium in a cold rain which soon turned into snow.

Page 2 is an article written by **Harry Boothe**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bat. "I" Co was in the same area on Dec. 24, 1944 in defensive position on high ground overlooking Malmedy and I recall the Air Force and buzz bomb artillery. I'm not sure where we were on Xmas day or what we had for dinner.

We were trucked back to the Werbomont area and then were "selected" by **Gen. Ridgway** to attack, capture and hold Manhay "at all costs." Those of us who were in the attack on December 27, 1944





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and survived the next few days know that the cost to "I" Co. was high.

Page 3 is a good picture of the conditions which "I" Co endured in our days in the Ardennes. I lasted until January 16, 1945. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year? As Scrooge said, "Bah, humbug."

I'm grateful for the friendships I have made in recent years with guys I didn't really get to know as I was only with "I" Co. from Sospel to Belgium. I still remember the candle-lit face of **Capt. James Birder** as [...] who were replacements at the same time, **Dick Weegar** and **Fred Schmeisser**. I think of them and all the other 517RCT I got to know since 1944-45 through the Association, all the time and especially at each Christmas season.

God bless you and your loved ones. I look forward to the next time we get together and may you have a truly blessed 1999 Christmas season and a Happy (Y2K) New Year.

Sincerely,

**John J. Strojan**

"I" Co. 517<sup>th</sup> RCT

Airborne All the Way.

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**Harry Boothe's** story as reprinted in the Thunderbolt, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 1995:

### **Vet remembers Christmas in war zone**

On the 23 of December 1944, my unit, the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team, was attached to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, which I believe was placed in Gen. Hodge's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army under the command of British Gen. Bernard Law Montgomery, on the north rim of the German Battle of the Bulge, in the Belgian area towns of Stavelot, Trois Ponds and Malmedy.

In the early afternoon of Dec. 23, our 20-truck convoy stopped on a bluff overlooking Malmedy one-half mile away. In a short while six planes approached, heading directly for Malmedy.

"Hey, spotter, what kind of planes are they?"

"They are U.S., so don't let it worry you."

Our convoy sort of lost interest when suddenly, bam, bam, boom, bam, boom, the whole area rocked. We automatically dove for the ditches and woods. I was in the lead truck and when things quieted down I crawled out and peered over the bluff. Malmedy was a cloud of masonry dust and fire. We couldn't figure out what went wrong.

The mystery was solved a month later. As a war-wounded combatant in a hospital in England, I saw a piece in the *Army Stars and Stripes*. Six medium bombers, unable to locate their assigned targets, decided to salvage their bombs on Malmedy, which they last heard was in German hands. What a mistake that was.

We pulled down the hill and turned left before Malmedy and drove about two miles up in the hills northwest of the town and went into bivouac. For supper, we dined in 10-in-ones, three meals in one



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day for 10 men. We bedded down on a steep incline facing away from the Krauts. I leveled off a place and braced up the lower side with timbers to keep from rolling downhill. I took a machete and cut evergreen boughs to lay on the ground to keep from melting the snow and proceeded to sack up.

After what seemed a short night, I was suddenly awakened by a hell of a roar coming. I unzipped and stuck out my head: Here came a German buzz-bomb with a German plane tracking at not much over a treetop level. *Whooch, wooch* and that was that.

I went over for breakfast. The ration box was empty; not even cornflakes left.

“Fell out on the road. We’re moving out.”

I strapped on my gear, which consisted of a canteen and first aid belt, cartridge belt, trench knife, grenades, pickax, carbine, gasmask, ditty bag, overcoat, and topped off with my helmet and 60 pounds of 81mm mortar smoke ammo.

We marched down the road with a column on each side, five yards apart.

Dec. 24 dawned clear and cold. For the first time the Air Force was out in force and what a show! A fleet of bombers overhead, another disappearing, heading east, another coming over the horizon. As the flak started bursting around them, some were being hit, would start smoking or flaming; some the parachutes would bail out, some headed back for England and some blew up completely. Before the day had ended I could count the entrails of 1000 planes that had blown up in the sky.

As a sideshow, some of the first German jets had appeared and there were dogfights going on all day above and below the bomber fleets.

My show was suddenly interrupted when a small German plane was coming around a bend in the road at treetop level, sawing two rows of machine gun bullets up the road. I had the lower side of the road and took a high dive over the bushes, not knowing it was a very steep incline. After I quit rolling at a hundred feet or so, I looked up toward the road. There was my equipment strung out all the way to the top. After gathering my gear and making the top, a new bunch of faces were moving along the roads.

“Anyone know where the Headquarters Company is?”

“Up ahead somewhere. This is D Company.”

I traveled along as fast as my hundred pounds of gear would allow me. After traveling a mile and a half I came to the head of the line. No Headquarters Company. “Oh, they turned right at the field at the bottom of the hill.”

Back down the hill, and a pause at the edge of the field. I eyeballed the sky as there was plenty of activity up there. After getting my nerve up, I said, well here goes everything, and made a mad dash across the quarter-mile field.

Other than a couple of planes from the dogfight hitting the ground beside and behind me, I made it to the woods to flop on my face, completely done in. Finally I moved up the trail in the snow.

As I started up the mountain there was one of my buddies, not in my own squad, sipping on a bottle of wine. He had thrown away his smoke ammo and placed a bottle of wine in each carton.

“Merry Christmas. Have a drink.”





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“Look, I want to catch up with my outfit.”

“What’s the hurry? Have a drink.”

“I’m not to be caught out on this mountain at night in sub-zero weather not knowing where I’m at.”

After an hour I made the top and there was Headquarters Company. Lt. West, as fine an officer as a soldier could serve under, came over. Instead of chewing me out, he grinned and said, “Glad to see you made it. We have to dig in our mortars. Then build yourself a hut for it’s going to get damned cold tonight.”

I built myself a hut using small poles and spruce boughs on the top, sides, and bottom, and climbed into my sleeping bag, overcoat, boots and all, when tap, tap on my shoulder, by my corporal.

“You got to pull guard; Take either 10 to 1, 1 to 4, or 4 to 7.” I took the 10 to 1 shift. He took me out on a ridge and said, “Watch out for German patrols.”

Malmedy was burning with a dull glow a couple of miles away. Soon bam, boom, bam, bam again. I found out many years later an ammo dump had blown up.

Malmedy really lit up again. Wouldn’t mind to be there to get warm. Later I saw a movement in the bushes. I slipped off the safety and waited. Out came a fox dancing across the snow. I served my shift and went back to my hut. Over a ways a couple of boys were singing “White Christmas.” Then, crunch, crunch, crunch, which could only be the sound of corn flakes. I barreled over there. “So, you are the guys who got the last of the rations.”

“You want some?”

“No, stick ‘em back in the sack.” Then tap, tap again on my shoulder by my corporal. “Get your gear together: We’re moving out in 15 minutes.”

This proved to be quite a task with things scattered all over and no flashlight. Well, back down the mountain and after several miles we paused for a break. Being cold, tired and hungry, we cursed the Army, Roosevelt, and the damned Krauts and anything else we could think of. One soldier pulled out a tall can of bacon and built a fire. Can you imagine 200 men passing by and receiving a tidbit the size of your thumbnail on a chip?

Later, we heard a rumble of a tank column coming over the hill. We flagged them down and yelled, “Have you got anything to eat?”

Each tank had three wooden boxes of C-rations strapped on.

“Sure. C-rations.”

“Wonderful,” we hollered. “Heave them off. Merry Christmas, merry Christmas.”

A Christmas dinner was never more appreciated than our dinner of C-rations in the snow in Belgium so long ago.

**Harry B. Boothe** is a resident of Forks who served in the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in World War II.



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## More MailCall News



**William S. Hudson**

Monterey, CA  
December 30, 2016

596<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Engineer Company

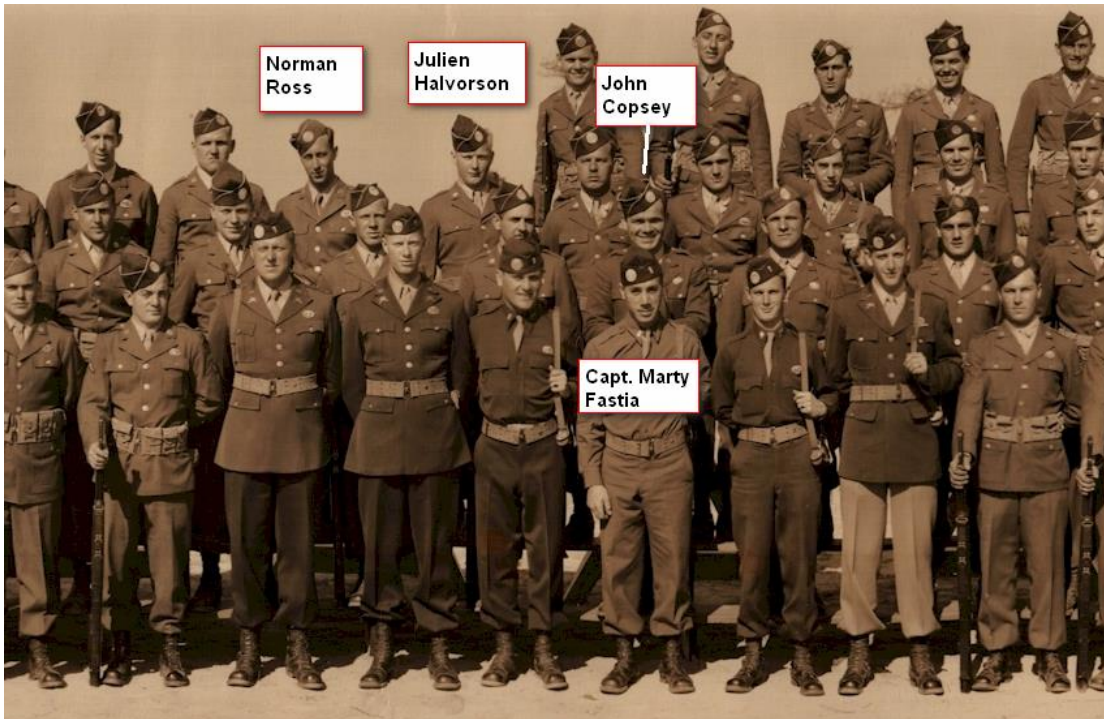
I wanted to respond to the request from **Al Eckart** and his daughter Denise for identifications of members of I Co. from Camp McCall in what I have to believe is the photo uploaded by **Kent Immerall**. My grandfather, **Norman L. Ross Jr.**, is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row 11<sup>th</sup> from the left. To his right is **Julian "Swede" Halvorson**. Both were the 30 cal. team of 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon. Julian passed on a few years back in Minnesota, but my grandfather is alive and well in Washington State.

Hope this helps.

Scott Ross

Grandson of Norman L. Ross, Jr.

I Co. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Battalion, 517<sup>th</sup> PRCT



I Company

at

Camp MacCall, NC

[http://517prct.org/photos/3rd\\_battalion\\_I\\_Co/i\\_co\\_mackall.htm](http://517prct.org/photos/3rd_battalion_I_Co/i_co_mackall.htm)



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Hey, Phil!

Happy New Year! I don't think I've emailed you back, even though I know I meant to! I hope that you and lovely Maya are doing well. What is the latest, dear?

We are doing fine - Allan is now 92, as I guess you are as well. He's doing pretty well and I am sure would love to hear from you if you felt like calling.

Is that summer snail mail address still good?

Big hugs, dear - **Claire**

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On July 12, 2016 at 8:49 PM **Phil McSpadden** <[philmcspadden29@gmail.com](mailto:philmcspadden29@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dear Family and Friends.....Lots has happened to me since I last corresponded with you.....In Florida, was in the hospital in January due to an emergency replacement of my Pacemaker battery, then the Villages Rehab (not a part of The Villages, but DON'T go there!) where I lost 50 pounds in less than two months, back at home, everyone got excited over my heart rate and to The Villages Hospital for a week with lots of tests....was originally there for pre-op to have a knee replacement, but wound up with a heart problem. Left there with an external defibrillator and a 4 pound battery pack I must wear 24/7. My kids all upset, so placed my house on the market, and my daughter in California quickly found a place for me there. Two of my children flew down from Illinois and did all the packing.....still have some to unpack!!!

Well, now to the current news.....Have been seeing a cardiologist and this past week went to see him prior to having a minor surgery Aug 1. After I checked in and found a seat in the waiting room, in walked a Priest, looking like he had just stepped out of a movies scene as Friar Tuck....big man, dark robe, white rope for a belt, and looked the part. After checking in, he looked around the room and his eyes quickly found me, and started over to my chair. WHAT IS GOING ON??? IS THIS BAD NEWS OR WHAT??? He came directly to me, and believe me, my thoughts were churning, that the doctor had called him in to deliver the last rites, that the doctor was not as competent as I had thought and he needed a Priest for a back-up???????? It turned out the Priest had seen my hat that indicated I had served in WWII, Korea and Vietnam, and he just wanted to talk!!!! Turned out he was a really nice guy, and gave me a blessing before I was called in to see the Doc.

I had seen another Cardio specialist before I saw this one and he confirmed that I would have my Pacemaker replaced on August 1 that would do lots of things this one isn't doing....and I could take off this Bra/Vest I've been wearing. This procedure will be an in and out the same day, and if all goes well, another procedure will take place in ab out 6 weeks and hopefully will strengthen my heart so I can have a knee replacement....I'm lost without my set of wheels I use even to go only 10 feet.

Now, that I have burdened you with my tale of woe, I must add one more thing-----I've lost my address book....so, would you please reply to this e-mail and give me your name, address, phone #, e-mail and date of birth (month and day will do!!!!) If you have children, please do the same for them, as I don't have all the e-mails for everyone.

Off to San Francisco tomorrow to the ENT Clinic at the VA Hospital. Mostly I go north to Windsor (7 miles) to the VA Clinic, but some areas are not available there.

Miss Florida, but at least I'm eating 3 meals a day here, and the food is good. I've gained back some weight, so now I have to start watching my calorie intake. I quit driving in Florida, so have to depend on my son and daughter here (and their spouses) to take me to doctor appts and shopping. Getting even with them for all the trips I made for them when they were growing up.



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Looking forward to all your replies....love, phil

From: <http://genealogytrot.blogspot.com/2014/10/richard-junior-trotter-interview.html>

## Richard Junior Trotter

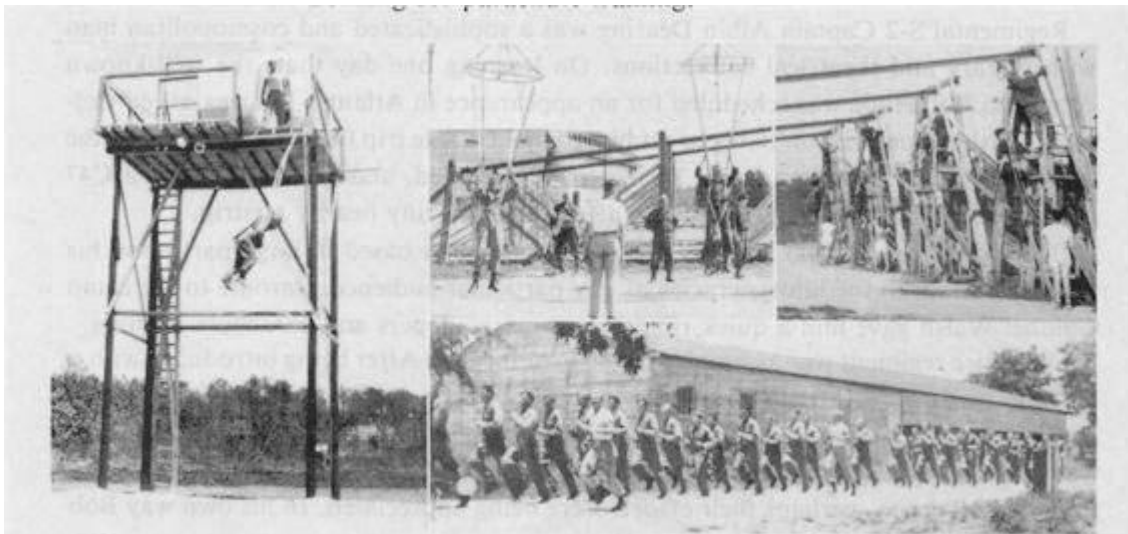
*In 1995 my uncle Darce and his wife Nancy videotaped an interview with my grandfather Richard Junior Trotter. At the time of the interview I was self-absorbed with a relatively new marriage and the birth of my first son. I am so grateful that my aunt, uncle and grandparents had the foresight to see the value of such an interview. A few years ago I transcribed the recording and added both to my genealogical records.*



I was 19 years old, I was close to being drafted so I volunteered [April 1943]. Then I volunteered for the paratroopers because it was \$50 extra per month. Three of us left Provo together. We went to Fort Douglas to join and they shipped us to Georgia--Fort June Georgia. We were split up and they put the three of us into Artillery and shipped us to [Camp McCall](#) in North Carolina on the outskirts of Fort Bragg. We started to fill out the [17th airborne division](#). They got our regiment ready to go, through [Jump School](#) in Fort Benning. [517th combat team](#) regiment in Italy.



When we came out the rest of the division wasn't ready so they pulled us out of the 17th airborne and sent us overseas to the [15 August 1944 - [Operation Dragoon](#)] The fighting was hot and heavy then. They sent us in as artillery ground troops.



Parachutists Training, Fort Benning, GA



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In that area the largest artillery barrage in the history of the world, until that time, was laid down there. We fought there for a while and that was the first time some of our guys were killed. When they first formed the airborne they had to drop jeeps with six parachutes. They came in parts that were daisy chained together. You don't make many jumps behind the German lines and live to tell about it. We knew we would be behind the lines. We jumped about 4:40 in the morning. It wasn't daylight yet. There was a cloud cover and I thought I'd seen the ocean. In those days the shoots and that, if you hit that water you were done for. I was coming down sitting like a swing and I dropped through the clouds and hit a stone wall. I twisted my knee... I think I pulled it out of joint because it hurt so bad. I was so damn scared I got it back in I think but it was sore for a long time.

They dropped us a little bit short of the DZ zone; we had a guy in our sortie they put in charge that was a doctor. A sortie of planes you know... I think he was high on pills and had us jump early. We only had about 12 men in our plane. I was only a sergeant and jump master then.



**Briefing.**



**Pondering.**



**Hook-up.**

We had our belly loads; you know, but no artillery, machine guns. In the door of the plane we always had a machine gun cart with rubber tires but the tires were all flat. The first man out had kicked a cart of machine guns out and followed it down... We got about a dozen of us together and we were way short of the zone. You can't do much fighting when there is only a half a dozen of you against the German army. So we crawled around in ditches and that, we damn near got killed one time by our own planes. They spotted us one time, some Mustangs, and they turned loose and raked the devil out of us. We got through that hiding most of the time, you know, trying to work back into Chateau Rosalee in the DZ zone.

This one place we came to had lots of trees for hiding from airplanes. There was an old well there and we got some water out of it. Old Asvito (name sp?) and the end of the break says, "Come on guys it's time to go." He had left his Carbine in his machine gun car. He lifted it up and it shifted some damn way and pulled the trigger on his carbine and it hit him right though (pointing to his chest about at the bottom rib). We were hiding out and he got shot through the lung, I thought he was going to die before he could even get a breath. We had to leave him, all we had, he wasn't bleeding externally but we didn't know what had happened inside. We dumped some old salcum [sulfa] powder and wrapped a bandage around him and left him under a bush there. That same day they brought the gliders in, a bunch of English paratroopers and gliders had come in and they got some jeeps in there. They run with a red



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cross, English, and we told them where Asvito was. We went on and I never heard another thing for months. We were clear up in Belgium and one day here he came up the road and (raising his hand), "Hi guys." They had got him and taken him back to Italy and patched him up. They didn't send him home but they sent him up to Van Wines.

Then we got with the outfit, well before I actually got all the way back, we kind of set up with some British. We kind of sat on the outskirts and let them do the fighting. They pushed some Germans out for a kind of headquarter outfit. They let them out and we went in to look around and there were some bicycles. We thought, hell let's get us some bicycles because we still had a ways to go. We got around in back and they had an old 1936 Ford convertible. Of course in 1943 that wasn't too old of a car. It had a wood burner on the back. You could run a car on wood, hell



I could build a car that would run on wood in nothing flat. I was a motor Sergeant, we got around there and cranked her up and got her perking good. We had a big red call there and we came out of there with two gunnysacks full of liquor and a convertible. We drove into Chateau La Rue, a cross roads, our unit was there. They got in there and held it; and that's how I got back to my unit. I thought I had a car until the officers saw it and they took it away in a hurry because we was hurting so bad for transportation. We used that old car clear until we got into the maritime Alp Mountains. I was a Motor sergeant, but after we got the ships in we would get our vehicles but we were always short of vehicles. One time in southern France, I walked 20 some miles in one day because they had blew a damn bridge out. What few vehicles we had had come in on the gliders and that but we didn't have enough. Each vehicle has an assigned driver and the rest of us walked because when they started making us we was an airborne unit.

Once we got into France, then we swung south back towards the Italian border through the [maritime Alp Mountains](#). We went into old Fort [Sospel](#),

an old French fort right on the Italian border. The damn Germans had it and it was all underground. We called the air corps in and they bombed it, they couldn't scratch it, not even the big Navy guns off the coast in the Mediterranean. Those bunkers, at the top of them, was concrete bunkers [at a steep angle leaning in towards one another]. It was 18 feet at the top [sloping down on either side] and they had, I can't remember the millimeter at the time but it was on a big hydraulic hoist and they would come up [out of the bunker] and BOOM, then they would sink back down. Those old shells you could hear them coming like a freight train. I think you could run a city block before they got there. They was not effective because we was right in the mountains and it was too heavy. We couldn't blast them out so we set our guns around there and even a little motorcycle come





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loose out of there they would turn the whole battery loose at it. We finally forced them back out, pushed them into Italy, to the coal valley and we took Fort Sospel. Then they moved a mechanized unit up there to take over and they lost it. The Germans came back and regained it but by that time they had moved us out. Then everything broke loose.

They [the Germans] got going and were moving across the wheat fields there, they had broke through the head rows there in Normandy. Old Patton had run his, he was a... there weren't any other serviceman like him, old blood and guts. They ran their dang tanks out of Gaston, Belgium and the Germans counterattacked with the bulge. By that time I had had so much time on the lines, I was supposed to go to England on furlough and that was in December. When the bulge come about in the middle of December, they backed us up; every airborne unit we had. The Germans came through like... the whole bunch of them, you remember the bulge. They threw us into the lines in the middle of December.

[15 December 1944 - Battle of the Bulge]

The 82nd airborne, at the time I was still in the combat team the 517th combat team. They attached us to 82nd airborne division and threw us up into the bulge. The 82nd and 101st airborne was there, plus a lot of the others, but that was the two main airborne units. We was on the left flank and the 101st was on the right flank, where the spearhead had come through. It was pretty rough fighting. If you remember the 101st was at Gaston. Where the general said nuts to, "will you surrender?" They surrounded the 101st airborne and they wanted them to surrender and the general sent back the word "Nuts"; they wouldn't surrender. They held Gaston but I was right on the other side of the spearhead. We didn't get surrounded. I didn't have a change of clothes, I had a duffel bag, I had one change of clothes and I put it in that bag; from the middle of December until the first of March. That was the coldest weather in Belgium in 30 years. It got 10 below zero, you didn't dare go in a building because they would target them. You didn't dare get around trees for fear of shell burst. The safest place was in a gully or to dig a hole.

They took some pallets out into a field on the snow. Hung a six foot tarp around it and run some pipes from some old trucks, we hadn't had a shower either. They strung the pipes up and had some old pump truck with heaters in them and they had a little trickle. You'd start out on the pallets and strip off your clothes and you'd walk right through. The guys would get in that water and the guys would not get out. They had to send in the officers to kick the guys out. When you got through they had clean clothes in a big pile. All the underwear had been laundered and thrown in a big pile. This was the middle of the winter so the uniform was wool. They didn't have dry cleaners and it was filthy so the washed them. Everybody was out there trying to stretch a pair of pants out big enough to get in... but it was clean.

You are afraid you won't jump, they instill that into you, you know damn well you are afraid. Before you get that far you have made several jumps. You have to make five jumps to even qualify. Then you go on to your training jumps after that. Now a-days we go down and watch the para-sail now and they are so much improved. They still use the old round shoots in the military because the others are too expensive. You always carry two shoots when you jump. You have a chest pack that is in emergency.

They had a points system. If you were married you got five points. If you were wounded you got five points. Herald was married and ???? wasn't but you got five points for being wounded. Well Herald had got shot over there, a damn German sniper had got him. ???? got hit by one of those damn big shells coming down the canyon, by shrapnel. So they both had more points. I could come home then if I signed up to go to the Pacific but no more war for me, I had all I wanted. So I stayed with the 82nd and ???? and Herald came home and we moved into Berlin.



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The second army division was moved into the occupation of Berlin in the first 30 days. Then we moved in. It was kind of an honor to move in. They let the 2nd army go in then the 82nd airborne. So I was in Berlin 30 days after the end of the war. I was in Hitler's headquarters, the Reichstag. In fact, I have that old picture of it in there. That was before... of course there was no such thing as the iron wall. I've got pictures, you'd fraternize with the Russians, drank their Vodka. Where the iron wall is, or was, they had put a great big billboard. They had Stalin, they had Roosevelt, Truman. But someplace in there it shows before the iron wall was ever built in Berlin.

I've always had skin trouble but of course if you have a little stuff wrong with your skin you don't get out, if you could walk they used you. Well I ended up in the hospital in Berlin, because of my skin; thin skin, allergy. I got in a C-47 and flew from Berlin to Paris. They were flying a few home but it was pretty slow. Then they sent me to Brincks, France to a hospital ship. Well that was all right. Big wide isles, two bunks high, sheets on your bed, all you could eat. You could even go down in the middle of the night and the cooks would cook you a steak, in the middle of the night. We went over with hammocks, 5 high, isles (holding hands less than three feet apart) with your duffel bag and have a guy get sea sick above you. They started feeding at four in the morning until ten at night. If you could eat it, they served two meals a day. It was a mess... terrible. I came all the way home from Berlin to the state of Washington in a bath robe. They sent me from Fort Lewis to Fort Douglas and I was discharged from there.

When I came over that hill and saw Utah valley I decided I would never leave again. People don't realize what World War II was. What did they kill 10,000,000 people? It was huge; it was like Gloria was talking about. You couldn't go down and buy a tire. You couldn't buy a pound of butter. You couldn't buy steak unless you had rations for it. No Sugar, no coffee and that was for civilians. No gasoline without ration stamps, that was in this country. When this country got together and went all out. They say the gulf war in the desert, hell that wasn't even a skirmish. Vietnam was a policing action it wasn't an all out war. It wasn't a war it was a policing action, we never declared war. If it had been an all out war we would have annihilated them

### Links/Resources

517th Parachute Infantry Regiment unit history - <http://www.ww2-airborne.us/units/517/517.html>  
The Battling Buzzards Home Page - <http://www.517prct.org/>  
WW2 Airborne Historical Company - <http://www.battlingbuzzards.org/>  
Paratroopers' Odyssey - A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team - [http://517prct.org/documents/odyssey/odyssey\\_history.htm](http://517prct.org/documents/odyssey/odyssey_history.htm)

Posted by [Mat Trotter](#) at [12:51 AM](#)





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Dear Bob, had to send this. I burst into tears when I read it. So glad we have some great boys out there, Anne Justice copy and paste

**Ann Justice**

### Teens Step Forward to Serve as Pallbearers for Veteran with No Family

[Todd Starnes](#) Posted: Jan 04, 2017 9:25 PM



Nobody should go alone.

“It was the right thing to do,” 17-year-old Bailey Griffin told me. “He served our country. He fought for our rights. For him to be buried with nobody there was just sad. I told myself I was going to do it and I did it.”

They buried Petty Officer Third Class Jerry Pino on a Tuesday. The sun was shining and there was a cool, gulf coast breeze meandering through the Biloxi National Cemetery. An honor guard stood at attention.

The boys were smartly dressed in khaki pants and Sunday shirts and neck ties. They solemnly took their places on either side of the flag-draped coffin and escorted a man they did not know to his final resting place.

“I went out there for the service and cried the whole way through,” Miss Cathy said. “He had no one there. This veteran had nobody standing there but these boys.”

But what happened at the end of the funeral was incredibly moving and poignant.

The flag that had draped Jerry’s coffin was folded and presented to the six young men from Long Beach High School, home of the Bearcats.

“It touched my heart,” she said.

It’s just proof that moms and dads are doing something right in Long Beach, that’s what Miss Cathy said.

“Our community is teaching these boys from the heart how it should be – how to care,” she said.

They are still trying to figure out what to do with the flag that draped Jerry’s coffin. It’s being encased in glass – along with a plaque that bears his name.

There’s talk about putting the flag on display at the high school or perhaps inside the locker room where four of the pallbearers play football.

It would be a fitting tribute to a man who died alone but who was buried surrounded by his fellow countrymen.

And oh what a lesson for the rest of us – demonstrated by a group of young boys from Mississippi who committed in their hearts that nobody should go alone – especially a veteran.

<http://townhall.com/columnists/toddstarnes/2017/01/04/teens-step-forward-to-serve-as-pallbearers-for-veteran-with-no-family-n2267337>



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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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PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM