



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2351

March 26, 2017

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

March 26 – Medal of Honor Day



March 25 is National Medal of Honor Day.

PFC Melvin Biddle, B Company, 517th PIR earned the Medal of Honor during the Battle of the Bulge.

Citation

He displayed conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy near Soy, Belgium, on 23 and 24 December 1944. Serving as lead scout during an attack to relieve the enemy-encircled town of Hotton, he aggressively penetrated a densely wooded area, advanced 400 yards until he came within range of intense enemy rifle fire, and within 20 yards of enemy positions killed 3 snipers with unerring marksmanship.

Courageously continuing his advance an additional 200 yards,

he discovered a hostile machinegun position and dispatched its 2 occupants. He then located the approximate position of a well-concealed enemy machinegun nest, and crawling forward threw hand grenades which killed two Germans and fatally wounded a third. After signaling his company to advance, he entered a determined line of enemy defense, coolly and deliberately shifted his position, and shot 3 more enemy soldiers. Undaunted by enemy fire, he crawled within 20 yards of a machinegun nest, tossed his last hand grenade into the position, and after the explosion charged the emplacement firing his rifle. When night fell, he scouted enemy positions alone for several hours and returned with valuable information which enabled our attacking infantry and armor to knock out 2 enemy tanks. At daybreak he again led the advance and, when flanking elements were pinned down by enemy fire, without hesitation made his way toward a hostile machinegun position and from a distance of 50 yards killed the crew and 2 supporting riflemen. The remainder of the enemy, finding themselves without automatic weapon support, fled panic stricken. Pfc. Biddle's intrepid courage and superb daring during his 20-hour action enabled his battalion to break the enemy grasp on Hotton with a minimum of casualties.



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MailCall News

RE: Father **Robert Geary** D Co 517th

Photo of my father who passed in 1983. Never talked about his service. Guess he lost to many friends. He is in photos on this site. Don't know much about his service. Only went to one reunion.

Robert Geary



PARATROOPER WOUNDED—
 Pfc. Robert Geary, 22, was wounded in action in France September 5, the War Department notified his mother, Mrs. Katherine Field, 416 Swatara street, Steelton. Graduate of Steelton High School, 1940, he was employed by the Bethlehem Steel Company before he entered service in June, 1943. He trained at Camp McCall, N. C., and in Georgia before he went overseas in May, 1944. He was stationed first in Italy before going to France. His wife, the former Louis Amsden, resides in Heckton.



standing L to R:
Faiola, Gettman,
Lewis, Bonner,
Jimmy Olsen

kneeling L to R:
Ben Shankman,
Geary, McDade,
Canziani



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Letter from the wife of **LT. Richard Spencer III** to the family of **LT. Ervin J. Pinkston**

from Jane W. Pinkston Santa Barbara, CA, March 16, 2017

1st Lt. Ervin J. Pinkston, United States Army, Airborne Forces, 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, 3rd Battalion, G Company

This is a dear letter from Mrs. Jo Spencer Clark, wife of LT. Richard Spencer III, to me and my sister after our dad died in 1998. Just about everybody in Company G knew "Spence". My dad often expressed his love and respect for Dick Spencer and his family.

Mrs. Jo Spencer Clark ** Colorado Springs, Colorado ** March 11, 1998

Dear Sook and Jane,

Your news about Pank the Yank's death made me sad. So many memories have come back to me since I opened your announcement. I called Lil Urban, Al Urban's widow who has lived here since 1960. She said she had many photos of your Dad taken during SUI days, when Spence and Al would go over to the ATO house to see the "brothers". She's sad too. What an unusual man Pinkston was, brilliant and so talented musically, always up, (until he passed out) and he was a dear friend of Spence's.

One of Spence's favorite war stories was about the time after the southern France invasion August 15, 1944, when Spence had been wounded at Col de Bra, up in the Maritime Alps. Pank dragged Spence into an old stable and buried him under a large pile of horse manure after covering him with a rain coat and fixing the sleeve so he could breath through the sleeve hole. Spence lay there hidden with Germans running back and forth through the old stable, and sometime later, after a noisy firefight Pinkston called down the sleeve opening, saying "Spance, we won". Later in the hospital Spence's arm swelled up like a watermelon, and an aide heard him telling someone what Pank had done for him. The aide checked with Spence about the manure pile, and said that's why the huge swelling. Tetanus had set on, so they knew what to do for that. He was in the hospital about a week. He took shrapnel from a grenade in the face and eyes and knees and on that southern France invasion, the Drs. luckily had a large magnet available and it drew out the shrapnel as the Drs. passed it over Spence's eyes.

We had a wonderful time in college, during 517th parachute days and after the war. Your Mother was a long suffering wife and I always admired her patience, which I'm certain ran out at times. I'm just learning on this contraption and haven't figured out how to make the print larger on the Word Processor, so I apologize. I'll be thinking about you all, it's sad to lose your folks. Next it will be our friends and that's what's happening now to me and my contemporaries.

Pink and Spence were cheer leader buddies, fraternity brothers, OCS buddies, Parachute School training together, 517th cadre in the Alabama area, 517th fellow officers in the same company, Co. G. at Camp McCall in N.C., and overseas in Italy, France, Belgium and Germany together and Pank beat him home, and came to see me in Des Moines, and saw B.J. before her Daddy saw her, in June of 1945, as I remember. The reason Pank came home first was that Spence had more combat points and had a child so the war was over for him. Pank was sent back to the USA in preparation for jumping into Japan, and while en route, VJ Day occurred.

Couldn't we all write a book? Hang in there. I'll be thinking about you all. Love, Aunt Jo



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



March 26, 2017

Here are two letter's that Dad wrote to his parents from Southern France. You sent me a photo of my Dad with **Richard "Dick" Spencer** and I thank-you so much for it!

My dad was:

1st Lt. Ervin J. Pinkston, United States Army, Airborne Forces, 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, 3rd Battalion, G Company (1921-1998)

Jane W. Pinkston

Santa Barbara, CA



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

September 5, 1944

Southern France

Dear Mom and Daddy-

Have had quite a few letters from you the past few days, so I think most of your letters have caught up with me - your latest August 24. They seem to make good time.

Well, so far we have spent 21 days fighting on the front in Southern France, while most paratroop outfits usually only have to fight about 10 days after they land - but we're hoping to be relieved soon. Only 7 more days until my birthday and it looks like it will be uneventful unless they sign an armistice that day or before. Thanks for the bond - you can just save it for me when I come home. There is nothing I can use right now, so thanx anyway.

In 15 days, we marched 172 miles over rough ground and fighting too - so you can see we're not lacking for something to do and also why our feet are sore - these mountains are rough.

I saw Chuck yesterday, so you can tell Mrs. N. that he's O.K. I couldn't talk long to him because we were on the move and his Artillery outfit was giving Jerry hell - so - but he is O.K. And feeling fine. Jerry still knows the word "Co_____e" and he doesn't mind using it.

Mom - any time the paper says the Infantry marches 7 miles, you can figure the paratroops are moving 17 miles.

The night of the August 14th we had our equipment ready at an airport in Italy - at 2100 we had a movie and at 2400 the Red Cross mobile unit served us coffee and donuts. We then moved to our planes and waited. We were supposed to take off at 0220 but one of our planes caught fire while taking off and crashed - so we were a few minutes late.

I had 19 men in my plane counting myself - so we took off and I told my men to sleep - and they did because they were tired. At 0405 the Air Corp crew chief awakened me and told me we were 30 minutes out - so he and I removed the door from our C-47 (Douglas transport). I stood in the door and watched below. All I could see were clouds and water in the break of the clouds. I awakened my men and told them to check equipment. My Sgt. and I placed our two bundles at the door and soon I could see land and a few lights. I stood up my men - we received very little flack - so I wasn't worried, but just a little nervous. The Red light went on so I told my men to "hook up" and "close up to the door". In about 4 minutes the green light went on - I pushed both bundles out and yelled "Let's go" - We jumped at 400 feet because we had learned Jerry was waiting for us. My silk opened and I looked back and saw it was a beautiful s_____ - I could see it plainly. In no time at all I hit the ground - and hard - I felt myself to see if I was O.K., then cut myself out of my harness (with _____ knife), put my rifle together - cocked my 45 Automatic - and started moving - rounding up my 18 men.

We landed 27 miles behind German lines - so when you hear any of these Air Corps mamas telling how good and accurate the Air Corps is - you straighten them out. We then moved to our objective - fighting at different places along the way - but we got there 14 hours after we landed considering re-organization in strange country - that is good time. I weighed 262 lbs when I jumped - so I was pretty heavy. There are many things I cannot tell you but I'll save them for my next visit to the states.

In my Xmas box - put candy, gum, film, magazines and a couple of tooth brushes - also some handkerchiefs. Pack it well and mail early. Bill says he received my money order - film hasn't arrived as yet - Des Moines Register is arriving.

All my love, Steve



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

My note: "Steve" was Dad's non-Ervin name for himself.

Dad turned age 23 on his birthday in 1944.

November 5, 1944

Southern France

Dear Mom and Daddy -

Nothing much to say today because it is Sunday and nothing has happened so far. I attended Catholic Mass this morning just because there wasn't any protestant services to attend, so my knees took quite a beating, so I don't think I'll go again – seems I was on my knees 50% of the time.

One thing of importance – I have actually seen and inspected one of those forts like they have in the Siegfried Line. The one I inspected had 6 floors, railroad tracks in the corridors to haul arms on – many kitchens and toilets – good barracks, running water supply, air conditioning units – a gymnasium, ultra violet ray rooms, draw bridges, elevators and everything to occupy the forts for a year without anyone coming out. Very well camouflaged and completely under stone and cement. I was amazed, but it was a wonderful experience and I can tell you much when I come.

Enclosed you will find some more snaps taken by my German camera. Keep them. The best souvenirs. I am feeling fine!!

Love and kisses,

Ervin

My note: Google, Siegfried Line" The building described above is all underground.



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Thought of you all when I sw this

Lyn Vickers



Man Among Men!

That's the Airborne Soldier for You

Swift—Sudden—Strong—he comes out of the skies to fight on the ground . . . a volunteer and proud of it.

By the very nature of his work he must be a finished soldier—capable in every phase of his profession—ready and able to do anything from hand-to-hand combat to packing his chute or repairing a field radio.

This all contributes to the Airborne Soldier's outstanding characteristic—self-reliance. It shows in his walk—his talk—and in his work. The Airborne Soldier is truly "A Man Among Men"!

There may be a place for YOU in the Airborne—find out today—pick up this folder "Hook up with the Airborne" at your nearest U. S. Army and U. S. Air Force Recruiting Station—Get all the facts, then Join the Airborne.



**THE AIRBORNE
of the**

U. S. ARMY



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

So sorry to have been AWOL of late but the alligators keep coming from all directions.

Just saw Rick's email of 5 days ago sharing the news of Cody Thorton's ever persistent efforts on behalf of the association to dissolve it under Massachusetts law. What a blessing he has been. We never could have achieved the results that he has and maintained our sanity. Talk about patience and legal abilities. He has them in spades. The good Lord was looking out for us.

Pat Seitz

Thank you for the kind words. I struggle with prodding the bureaucracy because I know how bureaucracies can dig in their heels at bad times. We are close in any event. More very soon I hope!

Cody

Hi, Bob -

Have you seen this? I don't see it easily on the website (I must confess - just the briefest of searches!)

A Belgian friend, Didier Dradon, sent it to me. Looks like it's posted by a family member.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nDDEmMtBeQ&feature=youtu.be>

Nice interview!

Claire Giblin



I haven't seen this before. It is **Don Saunders** of the 596th. He died in 2010. Good interview.

Bob B.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

I am looping in Steve. Steve, I hope you can help.

I am copying Didier, who adopted the grave of Cpl. George "Pop" Jones, affectionately known by some as Pappy, possibly? You've seen Didier in Mail Call with the headstone, and I met him in Belgium last summer. He is a good friend to the 517.

He is trying to determine which platoon Jones was with, and why he was in that area. Dad can't remember which platoon, so I guess it probably wasn't his.

We know he is at Henri-Chappelle and died January 5, 1945.

Didier is trying to figure out where. If he knows which platoon or battalion, he'll know where near Bergerval. As is often the case, the local people know the battle fields very well.

My father recalled the story he was told at the time - remember, he was still returning to the outfit, having been in the hospital. He was told that for some reason, Jones was ahead of his group, and either captured two Germans or they surrendered to him. He was returning with them, and at the time, the German and US uniforms were similar in color (though the Germans had wool and the US had cotton), and it appeared that three Germans were coming. Sadly, it was said, he was killed by friendly fire, as he was mistakenly shot as the German in the middle.

Dad knows no more - not even the time of day or conditions. I searched the site but couldn't find anything.

Steve, Didier and I are really hoping you have something on this – at least which platoon. And do you think you could link him to the site with the newsletters on it?

you are awesome! Thank you so much!

Hope the family is well - much love and many hugs all around -

Claire

Steve, I thank you so much. You were exactly the missing link I think Didier is hoping for.

As with so many of our friends in Europe, Didier is very passionate about those who helped secure their liberty, and as one who has adopted a grave, feels an especial ownership or intense interest on behalf of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

He had thought that my father was his last hope, but I think that you have a bigger picture.

I, too, hadn't seen that video, even though I'd enjoyed Don's company at Kissimmee reunions for years.

Didier, the Wings newsletters were published by a friend of Dad's, **Charlie Pugh**, for many years. Steve made sure that they were scanned and preserved online, in a project that took years, if my memory serves me correctly. I think that the answer is here.

Steve, thank you so much. Hope your family is well.



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Didier, thank you for your friendship and care for one of our own, **Cpl. George Jones**. Thank you for remembering his sacrifice and that of others.

Bob, Steve and Didier, thank you all!

hugs and love –

Claire

That was Don... and I had not seen it before. Don and my dad were dear friends for about their entire lifetime... They were both from upstate New York, and I was fortunate to get to spend a fair amount of time with him at several of the reunions. He was a driver for the 596.

I have seen several references to **Pappy Jones** in the 596 history. I do not believe he was in in the 1st platoon, for we have been able to get a pretty concise list of the group that my dad was part of. That would leave the 2nd or 3rd platoons.

I have been able to find the following -

http://www.markleweb.com/gallery/main.php/v/wwii/menofhonor/Men+who+Died+in+Action.jpg.html?g2_imageViewsIndex=3

- This shows the list of KIA from the 596. It shows that he died during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium.

<http://www.markleweb.com/gallery/main.php/v/wwii/menofhonor/George+H+Jones.JPG.html>

- This confirms date of death.

http://www.markleweb.com/gallery/main.php/v/wwii/people/596large+ JM_001.jpg.html

- Select Full Size Link to get a reproducible image.... Pappy Jones is listed as the 4th from the right in the 2nd row (clip of him Attached).

... and here is a link to the 596 Wings publications that **Charlie Pugh** published for so many years -

<http://www.markleweb.com/joomla25/index.php/wings-596-publication>

I will see what else I can find.

Steve Markle

Steve, I thank you so much. You were exactly the missing link I think Didier is hoping for.

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517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

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Steve, thank you so much. Hope your family is well.

Claire

Didier, thank you for your friendship and care for one of our own, **Cpl. George Jones**. Thank you for remembering his sacrifice and that of others.

Bob, Steve and Didier, thank you all!

hugs and love -
Claire

Thanks for the kind words Claire... you and Bob deserve so much more credit in preserving history than I ever will...

Yes, the Wings project was one that took up a bit of my time but I need to come clean.... I have 2 more issues.... both of which I could not handle for some time.... the passing of my dad and the passing of Charlie.

No more excuses for me.... you (and everyone else) will be seeing those soon.

-Steve-

Ps. I scanned through the photo pages of the Wings that are completed, and unfortunately none of the historical pictures had Cpl. Jones. The search continues.

Fair enough, dear friend.

You're still a rock star.

Hugs, Claire

Attached is a photo from a Wings issue that has George "Pappy" Jones in a camp with Ed Larivay... another name that I do not recognize with the 1st platoon (but also on the 596 group photo).

Does your dad remember him?

-Steve-



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MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS-----



George (Pappy) Jones & Ed Larivey
Trooper in Rt. rear unknown



Cpl. Clarence Hatlestad



Warren Sandberg



Francis Lester, Driving - Russ Pearson in front
Joe Miller & Cpl. Earl Thomas in back



A German gun emplacement
going up. We used extra
explosive - MacFadden



Paris-1945 -- MacFadden



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Allan (Johnson) remembers hearing about him, so he thinks they were in different platoons.

Claire G

Hi Steve

Thank you very much for your searches .. More than two years ago I try to find exactly where "Pappy" was killed.... I don't discourage to find to which battalion "Pappy" JONES was attached on January 5 1945.. With the description of the place made by Don SAUNDERS telling the death of "Pappy" in the book "Battling Buzzards" and the battalion we was attached I think to have great chance to find the field where he was killed.....I know where were positioned 3 battalions of 517 on January 05th but I don't know to which "Pappy" was attached!!!.....That remains a mystery!!!

Thank you again for your searches

Best Regards

Didier DRADON
Avenue de la Concorde 216
4100 SERAING
BELGIUM

Here is the story of Pappy Jones as reported by **Don Saunders** in the book "Battling Buzzards" by Gerald Astor:

Cheered by the news that the 75th Division would now relieve some sectors held by the 82nd Airborne and its affiliated units, a bunch of 596th engineers under Lt. Ray Hild stripped to their shorts, plunged into the icy Salm River and, undeterred by an occasional mortar, constructed a trestle-style bridge across the stream to a bridgehead secured by members of the 3rd Battalion.

Other members of the engineering company busied themselves sanitizing roads and field infested with mines. Don Saunders was among a party of engineers combing out the devices. "We happened upon a large house and found it full of German soldiers. We captured all of them without a shot and I carried a wounded radio operator out of the cellar. A little further down the road, we saw movement in a field. We all dove for cover and a burp gun fired at us. Several of us shot back and wounded the German. Cpl. 'Pappy' Jones and I went into the field and captured three more Germans.

"We were marching them back when a bullet from behind hit Pappy and he fell to the ground. I called for a medic and held him in my arms as he died. I carried him off the field to our group of guys. It was my worst experience of the war."

So sad to hear of **CPT Ehly** passing. He was my Dad's company commander. Bob thanks for all you do keep us connected

Lory Curtis



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Here are some pictures of **Henry Szczepaniak** also his service number and name are on the back of his parachute wings.

Thanks

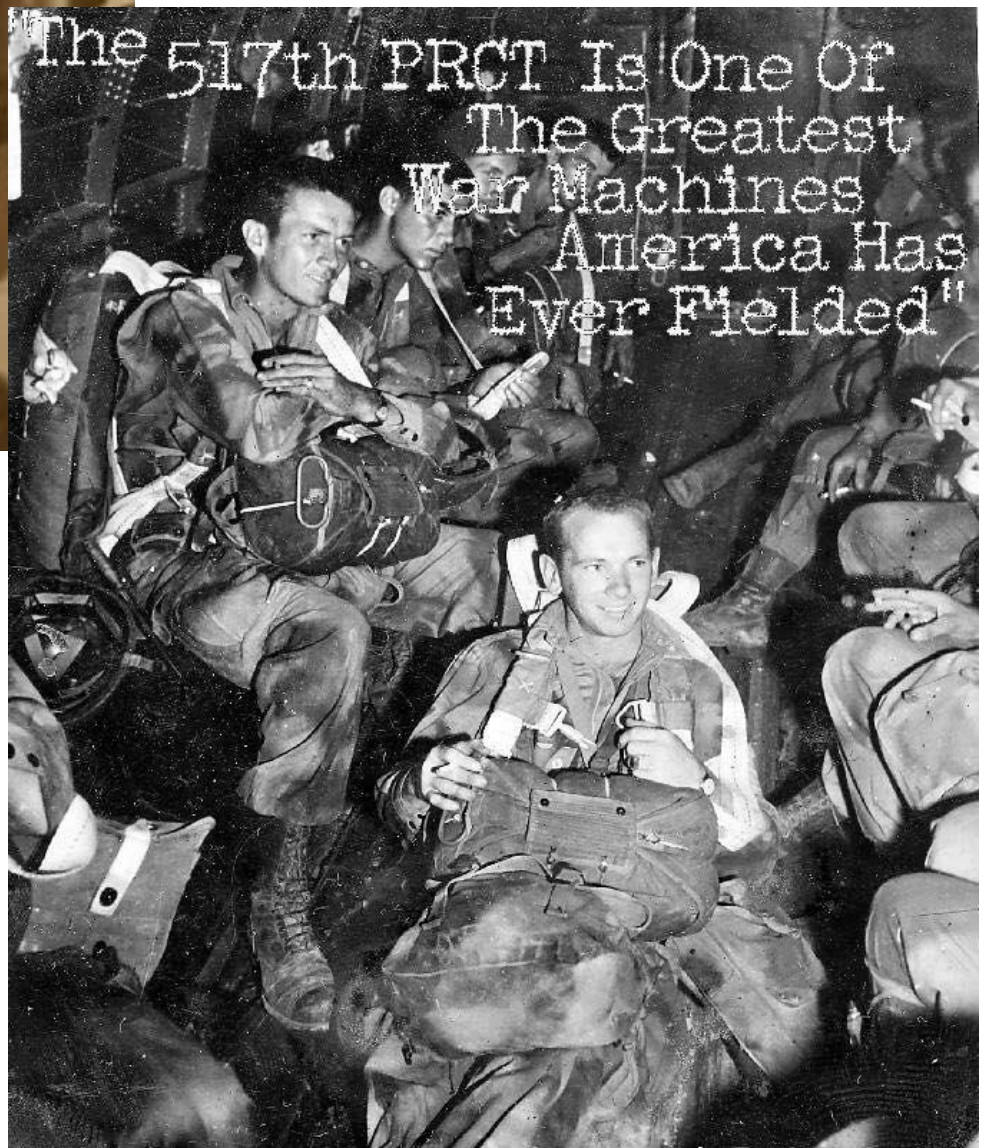
Frank





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

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517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

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
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Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

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