



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2368

September 24, 2017

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

Sgt. Orville Downey, HQ/1

Bonjour avez vous des documents sur **Downey Orville E?**
It orville downey 517th co 1 battalion

alexandre bouabdallah <k-lis@hotmail.fr>



Bonjour Alexandre,

I have a couple of photos of Lt. Downey and some info from my files and books:

Joined 517th March 1943 - Discharge from 517th Oct 1944.

Orville E Downey and his wife Judy attended at least several US reunions of the 517th, including the West Coast reunion if April 2005. They lived in Garden Grove, CA.



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Here is a picture of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion from Camp Toccoa, GA. Unfortunately, I do not have a listing of who is in this picture.



See: http://www.517prct.org/photos/toccoa_hq_1.htm

Orville Downey was one of the signers of the “short snorter” from The Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion - His signature is on the right side, just above “America”:



From: <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/2069.pdf>

There is a photo of **Sgt. Orville E. Downey** in the back of a jeep, driven by **Lt. Robert L. Lynch** in the Michel De Trez book, *First Airborne Task Force*:



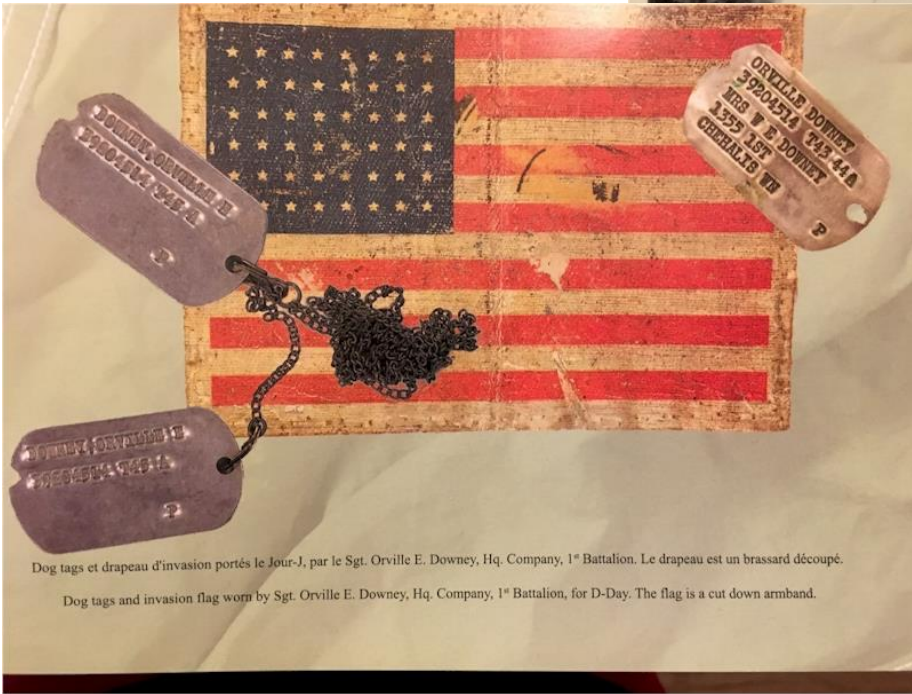


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There is another picture in the De Trez book, which is probably Downey, but mislabeled. It says, “**S/Sgt. Ed Jolly** and Sgt. Don Downey, HQ Company, 1st Battalion, cleaning their guns.” But there is no Don Downey. **Sgt. Orville Downey** is the only Downey in HQ/1. (attached)



S/Sgt. E. Don D. Compar. nettoien. Ils porte pantalons "mouta" modifié.
S/Sgt. E. Don D. Compar. cleaning. They b. modifié. O.D. trousers.



Dog tags et drapeau d'invasion portés le Jour-J, par le Sgt. Orville E. Downey, Hq. Company, 1^{er} Battalion. Le drapeau est un brassard découpé.
Dog tags and invasion flag worn by Sgt. Orville E. Downey, Hq. Company, 1st Battalion, for D-Day. The flag is a cut down armband.

The picture of his dog-tags is also from the De Trez book.

Lt. Downey died on June 23, 2005, and is buried in Riverside National Cemetery, Riverside, CA





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Searching for Pvt. Robert R. Gruwell (MIA/KIA)

Mr. Barrett:

I am about finished wiring the story about Pt. Gruwell. It has been an adventure - sometimes frustrating - sometimes sad - always very informative. I do have some questions that I hope you can answer as quickly as possible.

1. When was the 517th PRCT Association established?
2. Can I refer to the web site, www.517prct.org, as the association web site.
3. When was it, [month and year if possible], that your association realized Pvt. Gruwell was not listed on any memorial sites, etc?
4. When did association members return to France and were any efforts made to try and locate Pvt. Gruwell's grave at that time?

I hope I am not confusing things but I want to be as thorough as possible.

I may have some of these answers already in the stacks of material I have but I thought you could help to save me some time. I hope Pvt. Gruwell's story will be uploaded to the USAHEC web site for all to see by Veterans Day. I also intend to write about how I came about discovering Pvt. Gruwell's plight and the research steps I took to write his tragic story. I do not know what the edited version will be as I have no control over that, but I want to add as much as possible to the story. Since it will be on the USAHEC web site, there should be plenty of room. So, Pvt. Gruwell's story will be representative of the plight of so many WWII veterans and their families and then give the reader some insight into what kind of research possibilities someone may use to research other soldier stories.

Please get back to me as soon as you can if at all possible. Or, you can call me any evening at 717-486-8517.

Thank you so very much for your help. Hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Joe Figueiredo

[Trevor Loudon, www.theememieswithinmovie.com](http://www.theememieswithinmovie.com)

World War II Registry, www.wwiiregistry.com
United States Army Heritage & Education Center, www.usahec.org

"The power of the press is very great, but not so great as the power to suppress."
Lord Northcliffe, Alfred Harmsworth (1865-1922)
Daily Mail



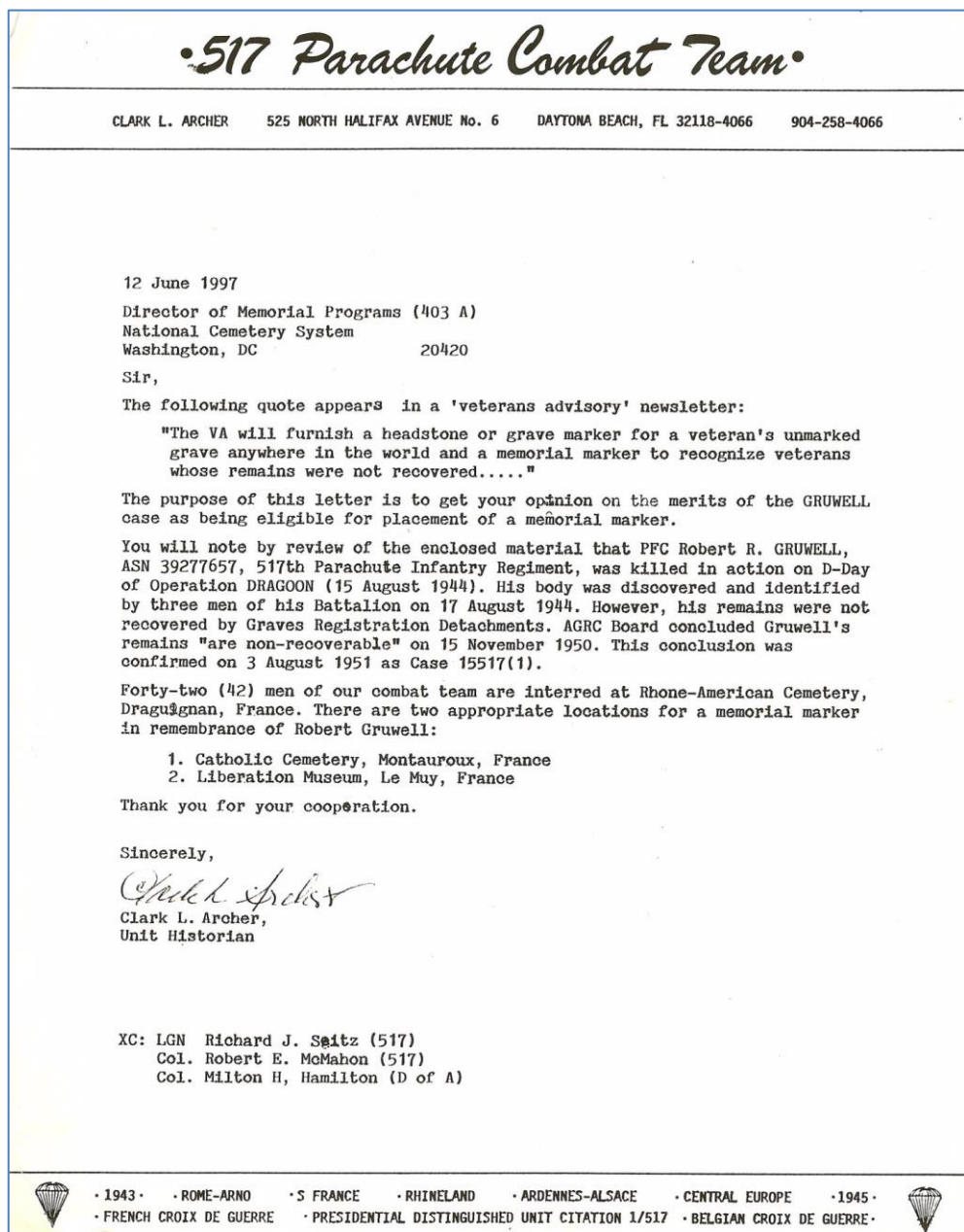
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Hi Joe, Sorry for the late reply. I've been tied up at work, and just now catching up on my emails. I'll do my best to answer your questions.

1. I don't know exactly when the official 517th Association was started. I know that Bill Boyle was the first President in 1970. As you may know, the 517th veterans' Association was just recently disbanded as an official corporation, and the assets were donated to Camp Toccoa/Currahee Museum in Toccoa, GA.
2. Of course you can refer to anything on our website. But be aware that this is just a tribute page to the 517th, started by Ben Barrett and maintained by me, but it is not an official publication of the 517th Association. But I would appreciate any materials to include some reference to the source.
3. From my very limited records, I don't know when the search for Gruwell's remains started. Obviously, his unit, the 3rd Battalion, knew that his remains were not recovered in 1944, but the earliest notes I have about the search and efforts to locate his remains was from 1997:
<http://www.517prct.org/mail/all/2161.pdf> That's all I know about the search in 1997, but I will ask if anyone else was involved.

We are all looking forward to hearing your story about Pvt. Gruwell. It has been a long time in coming, so thank you for your work.

And we all hope the story is not ended. The army has officially taken up the search and we hope to have some more info in the next few months, so stay tuned. In your research, have you been able to locate any of Gruwell's family or relatives? If so, please let me know ASAP. That could be critical in the identification of the remains, if they are located.



Bob Barrett



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8/22/2017 - RE: [Non-DoD Source] RE: **PVT Robert Gruwell**, 517 PIR. WWII MIA (U)

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED

CAVEAT: None

Hi Mr. Barrett,

Thanks for your note. We have had success in arranging our search. In [...] we will be conducting a more deliberate phase of the mission. The city mayor is on board to support our efforts there as is the prefecture prosecutor.

What would be helpful is if you could pass my contact data to any family descendants of Pvt Robert Gruwell. I need to link them up with the Army Service Casualty Officer (SCO) and have the SCO request a DNA family reference sample from family members (it is a swab kit they mail out with simple, self-explanatory instructions). The FRS data is then placed on file at Dover AFB at our Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab (AFDIL) and will be tested against any remains we recover for identification purposes.

Attached is a picture of our team on the mayor's balcony in Montaroux, FA.

From left to right, **Dr. Jean Loup Gassend**, Major Gamble, Mayor Huet of Montaroux, **COL Forbes**, and City Manager Mssr. Chechenatto.



I will try to call you and follow up with this e-mail.

Best,

Chris Forbes

CHRISTOPHER S. FORBES, COL, U.S. Army
Director, Euro/Med Directorate, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

Unfortunately, I have no info on friends or relatives of Pvt. Gruwell. Does anyone out there have any memory of his family contacts? -- BB



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More MailCall News

RE: Missed MailCall

Greetings Bob, I hope you, and all the Barrett clan, are having a great summer. I ignore those who say summer is over after Labor day. We of the Northeast know September is the best month. For some reason I have not received Mailcall since August 13th. All my information is the same. If you are traveling then I'll be patient and it with return. If it's technical then it's out of my hands. Please pass along a hello to Joanne from me when you next see her. Thanks again.

All the best,
Paul Abbene

Hi Paul!

There was a MailCall on August 20, but I have been remiss since then. Things got busy at home and work and I wasn't able to finish the current issue. But I will definitely get the news out in Sunday.

Thanks for paying attention. I am glad that a few people actually noticed.

Bob Barrett

Thanks Bob, your loyalty and hard work does not go unnoticed or unappreciated. I often think how difficult it would be for me to add another responsibility to my life such as MailCall and I'm sure I could not keep up. I hope it does not steal too much valuable free time.

It is such a valuable living library and it is still connecting family members and friends around the world. Your Father started a great service to the regiment. Amazing how strong for a group that was active just two years. Great work my friend.

I miss the gang. Hopefully we'll get together again somehow.

All the best, Paul

For **Mike Kane**:

I just noticed that you live near AHEC and have done some research. I have been a volunteer at AHEC for the last 8 years. I have also been researching **Pvt. Robert Gruwell** of the 517th whose body was never recovered after he was killed in action of 15 August 1944. I am preparing a research paper about him that will be submitted to AHEC officials for inclusion on their website for all to see. I would like to meet up with you here at AHEC if possible. I have been through all of the boxes related to the 517th for my research.

Thanks, **Joe Figueiredo**



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My grandfather **Paul Lewis** was a captain in the 517th, I believe had held the position of adjutant. I have extensive photos and moments from his time in I would like to share, if interested.

Thanks
Geoff Lewis

Yes, we would love to have any and all photos of your grandfather. I see that he was with the second battalion HQ, and you probably know that he is in a couple of photos already on the website:

http://www.517prct.org/photos/toccoa_1943_officers_2nd_btn/camp_toccoa_2nd_btn_officers_1943.htm

<http://www.517prct.org/photos/walsh.htm> >

Col. Walsh, Dick Seitz, Ike Walton, and second row, **Lt. Paul D. Lewis** and **Tom Cross**. Not dated, but either at Toccoa or Mackall.

I can take the photos in any format and size that works for you. And any stories you might have.

And not to make work for you, but I would also love to have a short bio of Capt. Lewis for our "Meet the Troopers" page, if you are so inclined.

Regards,
Bob Barrett



Sure enough. I was planning on going through some of it today, I'll send some things over.

I've seen some of the pictures on the website which is great. I only know of two stories, and only one with any detail. Unfortunately he passed when I was fairly young, so it's second hand at best.

One is at some point after V day, there was one soldier, I assume maybe another officer who decided he absolutely must have an engagement ring from Paris, when they were in Achiut. They commandeered a Jeep, and made it back and forth in blistering time, and from what I understand they took several checkpoints with several feet of elevation.

The second story is one that is already documented on the website, which regrettably I can't add much too - The farmhouse story with the enemy mortar round. All I can add is that from what I am told Paul had a very spooky bad feeling about being held up in that house, and he had a bad feeling moments before the round came down and he exited the front of the house. He heard the shell incoming just a split second before impact and was able to take cover.

I will follow with more soon. Thanks again!

Geoff Lewis



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From FaceBook: [Operation Dragoon and the Forgotten Paratroopers](#) added 2 new photos.

▪ September 5 at 5:52pm ▪

Today, I would like to pay a tribute to a young American hero who lost his life 73 years ago in Southern France. **Pfc. Robert W. Brown** served in the US Army with the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. He was in a crew of pack howitzer's gunners.

Robert Brown, 19 years old, was killed 73 years ago and was the first Allied soldier to be killed in the battle of for the Col de Braus. A German artillery shell hit his howitzer and blew it up wounding nine other men and killing him.

Thank you for your sacrifice Bob, we have not forgotten.



I really enjoyed reading this issue of MailCall as I too was ever so moved when I first went to see the museum at Camp Toccoa. My Dad, **Lt. Col. Frank Grbinich** was a member of A company and he told me so many stories about the runs up the mountain he made while training in Toccoa.

Regards,

Margo Grbinich-Hunt

LTC Frank Grbinich was a PFC in A Company in 1944. He passed away in 1995. He was president of the 517 PRCT Association during 1985-1987. I haven't been able to find any pictures of LTC Grbinich

- BB



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From <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=718675>



Birth: Jan. 17, 1924 – Trafford, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, USA
Death: Feb. 10, 1995 - Cocoa Beach, Brevard County, Florida, USA

Frank Grbinich, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and supervisor for the Bendix Corp., died at home in Cocoa Beach. Mr. Grbinich was born in Trafford, Pennsylvania.

He entered the Army at the beginning of World War II and volunteered for parachutist training. After completing basic infantry training, he was in the first class of parachute training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He then became a member of a unique light infantry airborne Regimental Combat Team that fought in the Mediterranean and European Theatre.

In 1948, Grbinich was assigned as an instructor to the Army Language School in Monterey, California, to teach Serbo-Croatian. He went on to serve in the Far East and was assigned platoon sergeant with the 19th Infantry, 24th Infantry Division in Korea where he was commissioned.

Subsequent assignments were with various intelligence organizations as a staff officer and company commander. he also served as Special Forces unit commander and staff officer with special forces in Vietnam.

Lt. Col. Grbinich was the recipient of three awards of the Combat Infantry Badge. Other awards and medals include the Silver Star Medal with cluster, Soldiers Medal, Bronze Star Medal with cluster and Purple Heart with two clusters. He also received various unit awards and citations.

He was a master parachutist with more than 300 jumps to his credit, including two combat jumps and several free falls with the Special Forces HALO experimental team. Grbinich came to Brevard County in 1964 from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, after he had retired with 22 years of military service.

He accepted a job with the Bendix Corp. at Kennedy Space Center as a supervisor and as manager of repair and overhaul of anti-submarine warfare equipment in California. He retired after 14 years with the company. He also worked for ITT International Operations Division as assistant to the vice president.

He was a member of Temple Israel on Merritt Island, Canaveral Masonic Lodge and Chapter 366 of the National Sojourners, a military Masonic Order. He was national president of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team Veterans Association, a Shriner and 32nd-degree Mason, past president of Cape Canaveral Chapter of The Retired Officers Association and rear commodore of the Eau Gallie Yacht Club.

Survivors include his wife of 43 years, Bebe Grbinich of Cocoa Beach; daughters, Margo of Atlanta and Roxana of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and two grandchildren. Memorial services were held on February 13, 1995, at Chapel No. 2, Patrick Air Force Base. Burial in Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

Obituary: Florida Today, 11 Feb 1995



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Finding missing soldiers in Russia



This August I was in Russia again like I have been every summer for the past years, and once again filmed the local Russians in Stalingrad who look for bodies of missing soldiers. While I was there, about 15 bodies were found, but over the whole year over 1000 bodies were located. All the bodies were reburied on August 23rd. Unfortunately, as the Russian soldiers almost never had dog tags, only about 30 bodies out of the 1000+ were identified.

Here is a link to the video I made while I was there:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTfzKUxyZoQ&t=744s>

Regards

Jean-Loup Gassend



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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.

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