



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2377

January 14, 2017

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

MailCall News



COL. JAMES W. COUTTS
... Acting Commandant,
The Airborne School

Parachute Infantry regiment. As executive officer, he helped to organize the 507th Parachute Infantry regiment in August 1942, and then left for England under secret orders.

Coutts On Eisenhower's Staff

Serving on General Eisenhower's staff, he assisted in planning the airborne phase of the Normandy invasion, returning to the United States and the 517th at Camp Toccoa, Ga., serving as executive officer. In April, 1943 he became assistant commandant of The Parachute School for the first time, and was highly instrumental in reducing the jump accident rate from 12 to 1 per cent.

As regimental commander of the 513th Parachute Infantry, he went overseas again in July, 1944.

Now I remember – Part of the reason that I mentioned the 1944 study “[Parachute Injuries at Jump School](#)”, in last week’s MailCall, was that one of its authors, **Col, James W. Coutts**, was actually an executive officer for the 517th at Camp Toccoa, before he became the Regimental Commander of the 513rd.



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From the Facebook Page: [517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team - Families & Friends](#)

I started with the 509th in Italy and then served 22 years Airborne and Mech. My Dad's cousin, **Private James S. Slaten** was killed in action in Italy with Company B, 517th PIR. I look forward to seeing your posts and finding out everything I can about Company B.

Scott Slaten

PFC James S. Slaten of B Company was the second 517th casualty of the war, KIA in Italy on June 18, 1944

For what it's worth, we have this letter and postcard on the website, but I have no idea who sent these in. -- BB

1943 July 8 –

[Letter from Camp Toccoa,](#)

Pvt. James S. Slaten, B Co





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Nov 23, 1943

From Pvt. James S. Slaten
517th Prcht Inf.
Camp MacKall, NC

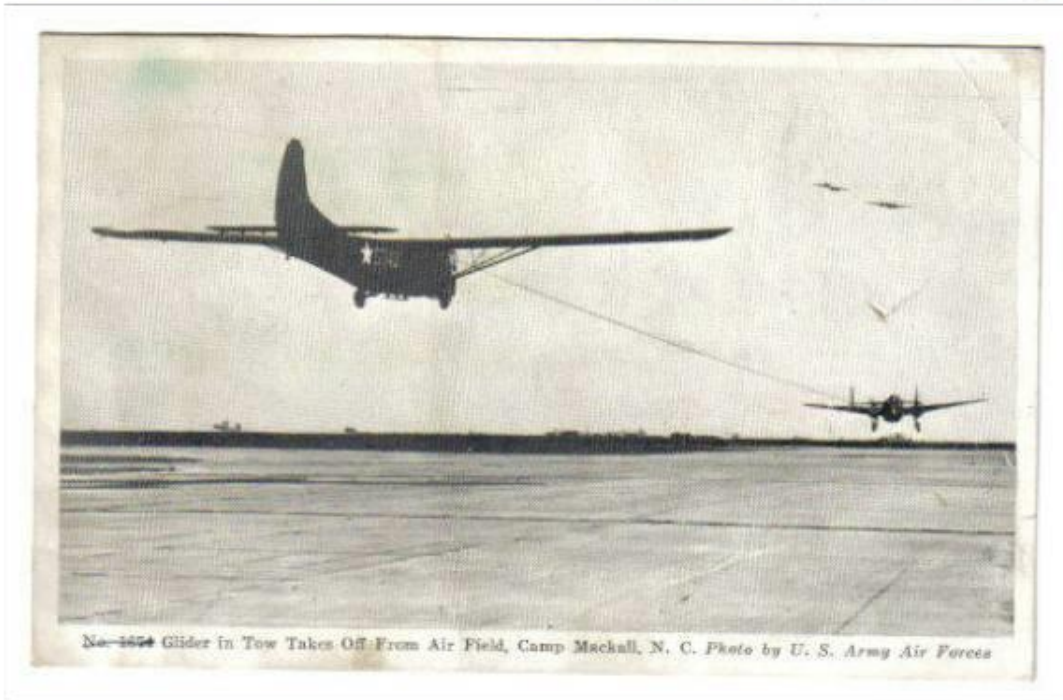
Hi Aunt and Uncle,

I'm very, very happy to announce a baby daughter, Mary Jean – 9 lbs & 7 ounces – Nov 16th on my 1st wedding anniversary!

How's Pueblo getting along folks? Fine, I hope. The army is fine but it's pretty cold here already. I'll write you soon.

All my love,

Jimmie



From US census records:

James Samuel Slaten was born on month day 1924 in Colorado, to James Slaten and Bradie Slaten. James had 4 siblings: Tommie Slaten and 3 other siblings. James married Hazel Bell Vance (born Langseth). Hazel was born on September 30 1924, in Clifton, TX. James lived in 1935 and 1940 in Texas. They had one child - Mary Jean. James was Killed in Action in Italy on June 18, 1944, at age 19.



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From Gerald Astor's book, *Battling Buzzards*, here are a couple of mentions by **John Forrest** (HQ/1) about **Jimmie Slaten**, his high-school classmate.

Page 73-74:

John Forrest arrived at Toccoa from Texas as a nineteen-year-old, self-confessed hellraiser. In fact, Forrest had been expelled from Texas A&M for disciplinary reasons. "My father worked for Phillips Petroleum. Several of the British tankers were torpedoed by German subs as they entered the Gulf of Mexico after loading at the Phillips terminal on the Houston Ship Channel."

The ship sinkings and the family interests kept Forrest aware of world affairs. "Several of my cousins had served overseas in World War 1 and were suspicious of the Germans in general. Actually I initially had some sympathy for the Germans' desire to rearm and reassert themselves after what I perceived as mistakes made in the Treaty of Versailles. My attitude towards the Japanese was based on prejudice. I resented the railroad gondolas of scrap metal that filled trains passing through our town. Many people expressed the opinion that the Japanese would one day shoot it back at us. The Japanese-American 442nd Combat Team which I saw in Italy and France changed my opinions about Japanese people."

Forrest enlisted toward the end of March 1943, intent upon entering the parachute infantry. "Some of my classmates and I while at Texas A&M had discussed the role of parachute troops. Obviously we really didn't understand it. I was attracted by the prospect of excitement, the extra jump pay, and the mistaken notion that being a paratrooper would somehow be different from soldiering in the straight leg infantry."

...

"The caliber of the enlisted men was excellent. They were intelligent and many had one or more years of college. They were upbeat, fun-loving and conscientious. Any one of them could have been an officer if OCS were open to them. Several came into the 517th from my hometown. Jimmy Slaten in Company B was killed in Italy while Bob Smathers survived.

Page 120:

John Forrest's baptism of fire taught him a lesson for the future. "The first action revealed to me, at least, a need for more aggressive use of scouts and flank security. This was pure hindsight but I was startled when the main body of troopers came under fire almost as quickly as the forward element.

"Immediately to my front was a freshly plowed area. Mortar shells started dropping and one hit in the dirt near me. There must have been a heavy rain earlier because the earth was muddy. That shell somehow buried itself in the mud before it exploded. All I received was a mud bath, for which I was extremely grateful.

"I heard someone from my company yelling words to the effect that 'Corporal Taylor has his gun (a machine gun) in action just over the crest of the hill. But he's out of ammo.' A runner from Company B, Jimmy Slaten, my high school roommate, came up and said, 'Give me a couple of boxes and I'll get it to him.' A sniper put a round through his helmet and Slaten never knew what hit him.

By the time the ammo got to Taylor's gun, the same sniper had hit him with a bullet that entered just to the left of his nose. He was dead also. Dan Hershey tried to fire at the sniper with his bazooka and he received a serious wound in the chest. We finally killed the sniper.



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“Although there were other casualties, these were the first that I had seen. One was a boyhood friend and the others friends with whom I had soldiered from the beginning at Toccoa. I felt some guilt about Slaten because I had influenced his decision to join the 517th. Later, I watched the graves registration people sack him in a mattress cover, throw his body into a weapons carrier and drive away with his head bouncing against the tailgate. Somehow, I felt I wanted to cushion his head.

From that day on, I was aware of the vulnerability of my comrades. But strangely, it never occurred to me that I might be killed. I was concerned about their mortality but foolishly convinced of my own immortality.”

Five members of the 1st Battalion were killed on June 18, 1944:

Cpl. Eugene L. Taylor, HQ/1
Sgt. Andrew J. Murphy, B Company
PFC James S. Slaten, B Company
Pvt. James L. Ellis, B Company
T/5 Spiros Gogos, Medical Company

Good day sir,

Is it possible to put me in contact with Kathryn March?
I read her article in this Mailcall. (about her post from 2007).
I hope she have some information about **Pfc Raymond W. Hanish**.

With Regards,
Koen Van Hoey

Hello Bob, just a quick note to say this link would not open in PDF. I went back through the last 5 posts and all of them open without a problem. Here is the message but no error number. I have never seen this before.

Error

Failed to load PDF document.

Thanks for your dedication. It mean a lot to so many people at home and abroad.

Don Gentry

Hi Don,

Thanks for the alert. But I did try it and the link works fine for me.

I'll check it again from home. But do me a favor and try again. I have a feeling it just might work for you now. I say this because something similar used to happen with Ben all the time. It seems that AOL has some method where the make their own copy of links and pages on the internet and these are always a half day behind for any new pages. And you are on AOL yourself.

Let me know either way.

Bob Barrett



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Administrivia

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- 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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