



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2386

May 6, 2017

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

MailCall News



Elam Cronquist, D Company and friends at Camp Toccoa

The notation on the back of this photo reads,

"This picture was taken the day before we left Toccoa. I have a carbine, Sergeant the machine gun, Kowalczyk has the M1 rifle."

I would like to have this photo added to the website. Thank you.

Shanna Cronquist-Denson



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Sorry I should have explained my email better. I was having trouble, since I'm not real tech savvy. I wrote this article about my Dad, and submitted to War History Online. They posted it yesterday, got quite a bit of response. I thought maybe it would be something you would like to add to mailcall. I also added some other photos. I love the one from Camp Toccoa. The others are just tied to his story, and not really related to the 517th. Thank you so much for all you do.

Shanna Cronquist-Denson

[War History Online](#)



Elam J Cronquist was born on the 15th of July, 1923 in Logan, Utah, the 8th of 10 children. He spent his younger years working on his family farm, before enlisting in the Army, in May of 1943. He was one of 3,500 men that were hand-picked volunteers, specially formed for the tough beachhead invasions, and spearhead battles, that were known as the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment Combat Team. They were an elite corp of American troops, better than any Hitler possessed, as their battlefield victories soon proved. They were screened during basic training and selected on the basis of IQ, physical endurance, and combat skills. All became accomplished parachutists. All became expert marksmen. The unit's assignment in the invasion of Southern France was to parachute into a drop zone behind the Nazi beachhead defenses and cut off their reinforcements while other US troops stormed the beaches. The air transport was fumbled, and the paratroopers were scattered 30 to 40 miles inland. In an ironic twist, German Intelligence had discovered the location of the drop zone, and were waiting for them. After regrouping, several days later, the 517th ambushed convoys, disrupted communications, occupied and vacated several towns, terrorized occupation troops, and diverted key Nazi defense units from the beachhead. During 94 days of consecutive combat on the front lines, they captured several

German strongholds. Later the unit was sent North into Belgium, in time for the "Battle of the Bulge," to support the 3rd Armored Division, and was used as a spearhead unit. Here Elam was wounded. The Bronze Star Citation reads in part "For heroic achievement in action near Trois Ponts, Belgium, on 3 January 1945. During an attack, Private First Class Cronquist, rushed forward through intense machine-gun and mortar fire to the aid of a wounded comrade. After dragging the man to cover and administering first aid, he received permission to assist the wounded and blinded Soldier to the battalion aid station. Private First Class Cronquist was also wounded and over his protests, was given aid, but only after he was sure his comrade was in a safe position. "The 517th endured a total of 5 campaigns, Rome-Arno, Southern France, Ardennes, Rhineland, and Central Europe. Few of the original men were with the Team at war's end. D Company, 2nd Battalion was the strongest, having 44 left of the original 189. Elam Cronquist was one of these men. He was discharged in October 1945. Following the war, he went on to a career in the rodeo, riding several times in the National Finals. He passed away in June 2001.

Photo and info provided by his daughter, Shanna Denson.



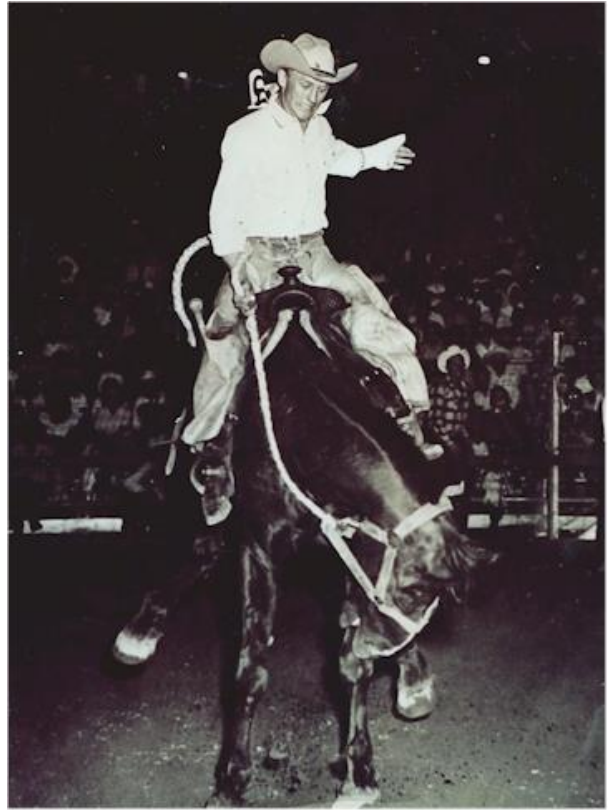
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On the 2nd attachment, notice the cast. Next two attachments are from the National Final Rodeo in Madison Square Gardens.

The last attachment is right before he entered the war, on his family farm in Logan Utah.

Thank you for all you do.

Shanna Cronquist-Denson





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I continue my quest for information about the Service Company of the 517th in Italy, France and Germany and despite everywhere I look there is amazing lite information that I, admittedly a poor researcher, can find on the duties of the Service personnel. It is easy enough to speculate; however, I find that a purist of little value. Having seen the one SVC Casualty Report available on the Website they, obviously were WIA and KIA but I have found no information about their basic jobs until called on to join the rifle companies or so far no indication of their performance on that or other assignments.

Can you direct me to a source which will provide an overall view?

Thanks.

Harris Johnson

I forwarded the the info to Matt Anderson; haven't heard anything back from him. I hadn't seen **Hoyt Kelley's** story before; I enjoyed reading it.

THANKS!

Mike Wells

Bob, I found this book Little Minnesota in World War II

<https://www.amazon.com/Little-Minnesota-World-War-Minnesotas/dp/1591935539>

recently and there is a tribute to a 517th trooper from Company D in it. **Bertil Quinton Gustafson** was KIA at Trois -Ponts on 03 Jan 1944. He was from Newfolden, MN, attended Concordia College Moorhead, and after initially being buried in Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery was reinterred at Ft. Snelling National Cemetery. The chapter on Pvt. Gustafson has detailed info about the 517th setting records at Tococa and about the fight for Trois-Ponts.

Regards

John Egelhof

Good find!

How many pages on Gustafson? If not too many, could you scan or photo the pages?

Bob Barrett





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Bertil Quinton Gustafson

**17th Airborne, 82nd Airborne "All American"
E Company, Private**

JANUARY 28, 1922–JANUARY 3, 1945—Battle of

Eighty-one year old Hal Anderson recalls his neighbor, Bertil Gustafson: *Bertil grew up on a farm less than a mile north of Viking. We were told that he jumped out of a plane and that he did not hit the ground alive. After his death, his parents received a flag with a star in the middle to hang in the window.*

Following graduation from Newfolden High School in 1941 and two years at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, Bertil Gustafson entered the army on June 15, 1943 at Camp Roberts, California. Three months later he transferred to parachute school in Fort Benning, Georgia, where after jump training, all units, including the 517th, joined the 17th Airborne at Camp Mackall, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.² Weber wrote that while many men washed out of parachute training, no one from the 517th failed to meet the high standards for expert marksmanship and superb physical training. One day an inspection team from Headquarters Army Ground Forces arrived at Camp Mackall to test the unit's physical fitness. Individuals took the physical fitness test, which consisted of pull-ups, push-ups, timed calisthenics and running various distances. When the results were tabulated, the 517th took first, second and third in all tests, scoring higher than any unit tested.³

On May 17, 1944, Private Bertil Gustafson and the 517th Parachute Infantry boarded the *Santa Rosa* for Naples, Italy, to support the invasion of southern France. Named the "Battling Buzzards," the 517th experienced heavy fighting in Italy in June before transferring to southern France in August for Operation Dragoon where they completed their first combat jump. Following the liberation of France, the 517th was attached to the 82nd Airborne Division during the Battle of the Bulge.^{3, 4, 5, 6}

Christmas 1944 found the 82nd Airborne stationed in Soissons, France, and about to endure one of the most horrific battles in World War II. Shortly after December 16, the day the German army decided to launch their final offensive in the Belgian Ardennes, Colonel R.D. Graves, combat team commander 517th Parachute Infantry, sent this letter to his regiment: *On the occasion of our first Christmas overseas, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartiest congratulations and greetings to all members of this*

<https://www.amazon.com/Little-Minnesota-World-War-Minnesotas/dp/1591935539>



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on

Viking (Marshall County)



" Division, 517th Parachute Infantry, 2nd Battalion,

the Bulge, Belgium

command. Although we naturally miss being at home, we do not feel sorry for ourselves but take comfort in living under the best condition possible and also take comfort in being with the comrades with whom we have served and whom we trust. At this Christmas time I wish you all a Merry Christmas. May the New Year strengthen the ties of friendship and loyalty and keep us steadfast in our determination to serve our country well and honorably during the coming year.⁷

On January 1, 1945, the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment posted the 2nd and 3rd battalions in an area north of Trois-Ponts (the northern shoulder of "the Bulge"), Belgium, with orders to secure the Salm River Line from Trois-Ponts to Grand-Halleux, a distance of three miles. Observation on high ground was impossible due to freezing weather, a thick snow 12 inches deep, and limited visibility of 100 to 200 yards in the low areas. On January 3, Private Bertil Gustafson and the 2nd Battalion were ordered to attack and seize Trois-Ponts and Mont-de-Fosse. The lead companies, D Company and E Company, suffered severe casualties, including Private Gustafson. Twenty soldiers died and 90 were wounded.^{6,9}

Private Bertil Gustafson was buried at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium, and on February 10, 1945, a memorial service for Private Bertil Q. Gustafson was held in Zion Lutheran Church in Viking.

Private Gustafson was reinterred in Fort Snelling National Cemetery.²





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This is my father, **Harvey Howard Epley**. He was in 517th PRCT as a member of B Battery of the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion.

Several Years ago my husband wrote to you and you requested a picture of my father. Will this help?

Linda Epley

Harvey Howard "Duke" Epley,

Dear Bob:

Have just finished reading the last two Mail Calls. **Mike Wells'** story about asking there was anyone in the audience who was a vet or had a relative in the 517th and the outcome of that comment, had a powerful impact on me. While Alan (Greer, my husband), never misses an opportunity to speak about Dad and his band of 517th brothers, Mike's suggestion is propelling me to be even more pro-active.

Happy Birthday to **Lory**. What a wonderful picture of the Salt Lake Mini-Reunion.

PS Was just at an 11th Circuit Judicial conference (covering Alabama, Georgia and Florida) at which one of the subjects was "the Dark Web" and the need to have vigilant cyber security to protect access to local government power and water plants. The speaker used examples of cities that hackers can get into with catastrophic results -- one of the cities he used as an example was Toccoa Georgia. The speaker had tried unsuccessfully to persuade the city officials to take precautions (and thus included it in the lecture as an example of a problem). If anyone has influence in the city of Toccoa, please use that influence to urge them to take better security measures with the dam control. Hopefully, the city is taking steps, but as of last Friday, the speaker was accessing the city's website in real time!

Pat Seitz



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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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