



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



MailCall No. 2405

February 3, 2019

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

MailCall News

Hello

I am french and I have a id of lieutenant **Robert I lynch** on 517 pir i him in you website.

It s dropped southern of france
The photo

Thanks Dimitri



see



264

Une Jeep patrouillant se trouve volant.

Headquar around the jeep and I

Un homr scooter p

A troope Cushma

There was a **1st Lt. Robert L. Lynch** in the Service Company.

<-- 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*

“Bob Lynch” was also one of the signers of the HQ/1 “short snorter”. See:

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



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Feb 3, 2019

Visiting the final resting places of three 517th soldiers from Northeastern Pennsylvania (Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area).

This weekend we paid our respects to three fallen 517th Troopers. One of our members lives in Larksville, PA and while researching the unit discovered that there are three local troopers from his area who lost their lives while liberating Europe and are buried in local cemeteries.

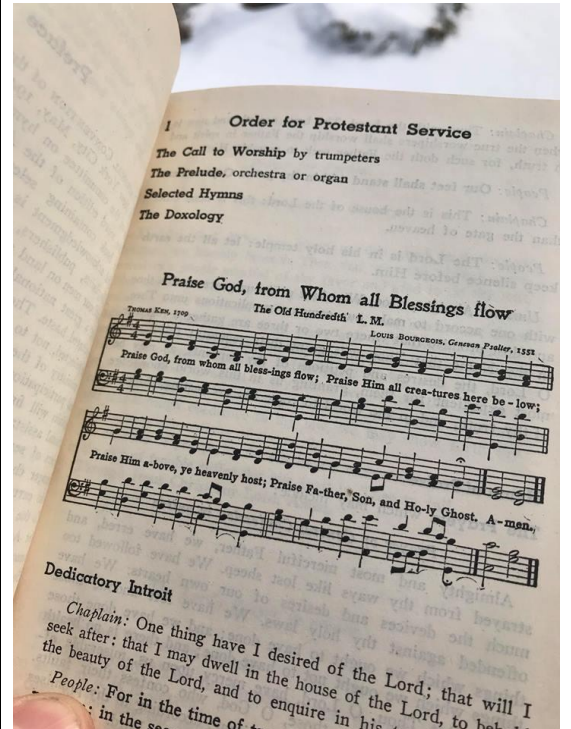
The three soldiers are:

Sgt Andrew Murphy, Jr, B Company, from Wilkes-Barre, PA, who was killed 18 June 1944 near Grossetto, Italy. Sgt Murphy is buried in St. Mary's Cemetery in Hanover Township, PA.

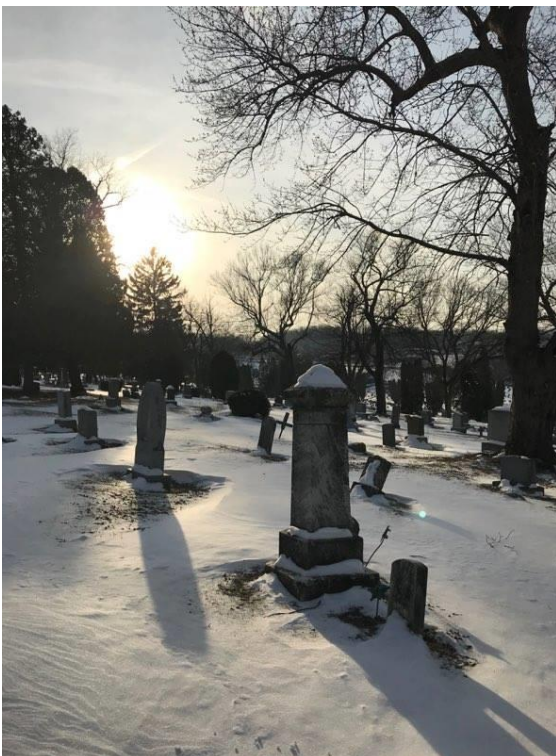
Pvt John Oblick, F Company, from Larksville, PA, who was killed 3 January 1945 in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge. Pvt. Oblick is buried in St. Casimir's Lithuanian Catholic Cemetery in Hunlock Creek, PA.

Pvt Michael Hreben, B Company, from Taylor, PA, who was killed 17 February 1945, in Germany. Pvt Hreben is buried in Saint Mary's Byzantine Catholic Cemetery in Taylor, PA.

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1942 Army & Navy Song & Service Book for Ship & Field.



We gathered at their resting places for a small prayer service by our resident chaplain and to replace American flags worn by weather. For Pvt Oblick, his grave was missing the metal flag holder provided to other's Veteran's graves. We placed a new flag holder and flag so others will know here lies a fallen soldier.

We reenact to remember all the men of the 517th : those who came home and those who never came home. We reenact to keep their memories alive and to pass on their history to others. We do and will always remember them.

Matt Holmgren

Fox Company, 517th PRCT (Reenacted)

<--- The sun sets on St. Mary's Cemetery in Hanover Township, PA.



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Pvt Michael Hreben, B Company, from Taylor, PA, who was killed 17 February 1945, in Germany. Pvt Hreben is buried in Saint Mary's Byzantine Catholic Cemetery in Taylor, PA.





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Sgt Andrew Murphy, Jr, B Company, from Wilkes-Barre, PA, who was killed 18 June 1944 near Grosseto, Italy. Sgt Murphy is buried in St. Mary's Cemetery in Hanover Township, PA.





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From **Loïc Jankowiak**:

Overshadowed by the landing of Normandy, the landing of Provence of 15 August 1944 had its major importance for the liberation of the territory.

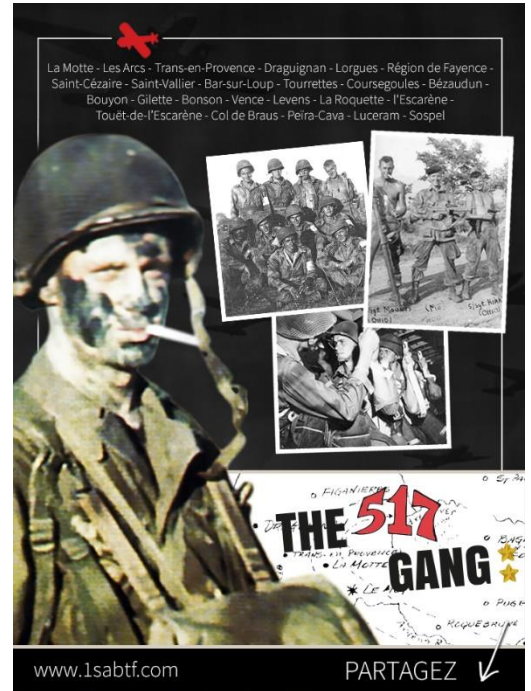
There are also 6000 paratroopers in the plain plain, between draguignan and the muy, but also in fayence. Among them were the men of the 517th parachute regimental combat team, from Italy.

The book - in two volumes - traced their journey from their first commitment in Italy until the liberation of sospel' on the Italian border. Then, from their commitment to the ardennes until the end of the war.

In Provence, these paratroopers first released the arcs, trans-En-Provence and other villages, and then moved east through the mountainous terrain of the Alpes-Maritimes through communes such as saint-Cézaire, grasse , bouyon, coursegoules, the rocket-Sur-var... to end up at the col de braus, a real barrier where it had to be dislodged from the German elements.

Many Photos and testimonies will be transmitted through this book and material from the battlefield. You won't see the fighting on top of it, but you'll be plunged into it, at the sight of the soldiers themselves, according to their own words.

Do not hesitate to contribute to the editing of this book by participating in the cagnote on <https://www.gofundme.com/the-517th039s-gang-the-book> or sharing this page.



Little infographic on the progress of the project ... We are near the end ! To give a hand you can donate on the gofundme platform. Every \$\$\$ matters !

<https://www.gofundme.com/the-517th039s-gang-the-book...>





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In Memorium – Robert L. Vaught, I Company

My name is Andrew Norman. I wanted to pass along that my grandfather, **Pvt. Robert L. Vaught**, (I Co.) passed away Sunday January 13, 2019. I would be honored if you could include him in your in memoriam section. If you need any more information just let me know.

Respectfully,

Andrew



Robert Layton Vaught passed away Sunday, Jan. 13, 2019, at age 94.

The family will receive friends 4-8 p.m. Friday, Jan. 18 at Sellars Funeral Home, Lebanon, Tennessee, and from 10 a.m. until the time of the service at 11 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 19 in the funeral home chapel. Interment will follow at Wilson County Memorial. Family and friends will serve as pallbearers.

Mr. Vaught served in the United States Army during World War II in the 82nd Airborne, 517th Attack Regiment paratrooper, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, and was the recipient of four Bronze Stars. In civilian life, he worked for Metro Nashville for 30 years, and as an electrical engineer with Mallory Capacitor Company. He enjoyed assisting with military causes and the Room at the Inn in Nashville, and loved spending time with his family, especially grandchildren.

Mr. Vaught is survived by his wife of 70 years, Patricia Dodder Vaught; children, Doug (Carolyn) Vaught, Teresa (Jeff) Cobble, Bill (Sandra) Vaught and Mary (Eddie) Harrington; grandchildren, Jeff Jacobs, Andrew Norman, Nicole Norman and Isaac Vaught; and two brothers, Ernie (Myrna) Vaught and Edwin “Doc” (Amy) Vaught.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Wallace and Willma Vaught; and 11 brothers Wilson, Lloyd, Wallace, James, Harold, Don, Sylvester, Gerald, Rex, Raymond and John.

[Accounts of the 3rd Battalion attack on Manhay 📍](#) - 26 Dec 1944

Recorded at the 517th Annual Reunion , Oklahoma City, 04 June 2003

Lud Gibbons, Fred Harmon, John Guthrie, Cecil Doty, John Strojan, Ben Barrett, **Bob Vaught**



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Bob Vaught, K. Allen Johnson, Darrell Egner, Hal Beddow, Dick Seitz, Leo Dean, Mel Dahlberg, Gene Frice, John Jonientz, Dick Hammel, George Kennedy, Hoyt Kelley, John Strojan
At the Kansas City Reunion 2012



Bob Vaught and **Ben Barrett**

At the 2003 reunion in Oklahoma City



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More MailCall News

Hi Bob! I found your email on the 517prct.org website. My grandfather, **Melvin P. Schneider** was part of the 517th. I am just curious if you have any information, stories, or pictures of him.

Thanks!

Tyler J. Goodwill
ESI Design Services, Inc.

Tyler Goodwill tgoodwill@esigroupusa.com

Hi Tyler,

On a quick look, I didn't find any specific mentions of Melvin Schneider, other than a few notes in the 596th PCEC reunions. At first I did not find his name in the December 1944 roster with the 596th, but eventually I found him listed with the Service Company.

http://517prct.org/documents/xmas1944/xmas_1944_service_company2.jpg

I did find one good mention of Tec 5 Schneider in one of the After Action reports of Operation Dragoon.

With about 25 men, Lt. Skutnik moved cross-country to contact the head of the column. The march continued until 1500 hours before a break was taken and then continued again at 2110 hours. At 2330 hour, the column had reached a point about five miles North of Bagnoles and established a bivouac for the night. Upon talking with the men, it was found that **Tec 5 Schneider, Rigger Section, 596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company**, attached to Service Company, had carried a wounded man down the steep slopes of the mountain to the Red Cross building and then made numerous trips up and down the mountain side assembling small groups of men and leading them to the 3rd Battalion Assembly Area.

http://www.517prct.org/documents/dragoon/service_co.htm

I will put your notes in the next MailCall newsletter and see if anyone else has some info.

Bob Barrett



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Hello!

I am the daughter of **Elmer Szakacs** a member of the 596th engineers of the 517th. I have been following your website & emails for a while now. My dad used to get the Thunderbolt mailings and always enjoyed reading them. I have also found many letters and pictures my dad wrote from the time he was in training and overseas which has been very exciting to see and read.

I would like to give you info for the roster:

My dad Elmer Szakacs died 1/31/2003 he was married to my mother Virginia, for contact info that would be me, his daughter, Valerie Heyden my address and number are listed below.

Thank you for this wonderful site and all the information you provide!!

Sincerely,
Valerie Heyden
54 Hillview Drive
Central Square, NY 13036
Ph: 315-345-0523
valheyden@gmail.com



Hi Valerie,

I will include your note in today's MailCall Newsletter. I do see Elmer Szakacs listed on the December 1944 roster:

http://517prct.org/documents/xmas1944/xmas_1944_596th_1.jpg

If possible, send me copies of any more of the pictures and stories for the website. I did include your previous photos in an earlier MailCall. <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/2363.pdf>

Regards,
Bob Barrett

PS: You might already know this, but there are several pictures of Elmer Szakacs in the *First Airborne Task Force* book by Michel De Trez. It looks like all those pictures were supplied by Al Goodman back in 1998. Attached is one example.

Bob Barrett



Les experts en sabotage du 2nd Squad, avant le Jour-J. Debout, de gauche à droite : K. Johnson, Patrick L. Michaels (KIA), Taylor L. Meyers, George W. Ayling. Assis, au milieu : Elmer Szakacs, Donald F. O'Neil, Robert P. Eggert, Robert S. Bogan. Assis, à l'avant : Leo P. Wroblewski, Howard Jaynes (KIA).

Demolition specialists of the 2nd Squad prior to D-Day. Standing, left to right: K. Johnson, Patrick L. Michaels (KIA), Taylor L. Myers, George W. Ayling. Sitting, middle row : Elmer Szakacs, Donald F. O'Neil, Robert P. Eggert, Robert S. Bogan. Sitting, front row : Leo P. Wroblewski, Howard Jaynes (KIA).



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Mr. Barrett

I am writing to you about my Uncle, **Joseph F. Van Ness**. He was a Paratrooper in the 517th PIR during WW2. He was in Company B and was KIA in France during Operation Dragoon.

I have written to this site before asking if anyone had information on him, but so far no one has stepped forward. His Grandson, Jeffery Van Ness has posted here as well. I fear now that time has possibly erased anyone with first hand knowledge of him being able to respond but we did try.

Your website has been a Godsend in many respects. I first found it right before the show "Band Of Brothers" I was on a flight, and very interested in the series and a guy next to me had an HBO Folder with Band Of Brothers logo on it. I asked a few questions, got directed to HBO's site, from there found his grave memorial in France, and from that found the 517th and its site.

This September my wife and I got the honor of visiting his grave in France. He is buried and Rhone American in Drauginan France. Beautiful place. Since that trip I have learned a bit more that I will now share with you here.

My Uncle, first joined the Army in 1936 and was stationed with the Infantry in Cheyenne Wyoming. He got married and had a child while there. He divorced that wife, and moved back to Oklahoma sometime around 1939. He remarried briefly, then rejoined the Army, early in 1941. Sometime around January to March? Based on photos we have of him dated March 41.

From here it gets interesting. It is starting to look like to us, he volunteered early for the Paratroops. We have a printed document, dated December 18 1942 from the 506th PIR to all recent graduates of Jump School. It is advising them how to act on furlough. This letter is signed by Col. Robert E. Sink Commander of the 506th. We have pictures of him at home for Christmas, 1943 and he is a three stripe sergeant then. He then was assigned to the 17th Airborne, volunteered for the 517th, rose to First Sergeant, and was First Sergeant of Company B at the time of the Army physical fitness test when three companies of the 517th won First, second and Third in that contest. His company, B came in Second. We have a document of that as well. He penciled in "My Company" pointing an arrow to B.

The above is intriguing because if he was in the 506th First, then in Company B of the 517th this means he might have went thru Toccoa twice. Once with the 506th, the other with the 517th. He may have only attended Jump school with the 506th since he had already attended basic training in 1936. However if he was already a sergeant and had been assigned to the 506th for Jump Training, it is possible he was assigned to the 506th as part of the cadre. We don't know for sure, but we do know he was at Toccoa with the 517th for sure. His Third wife, was from Toccoa, and he had a son with her. Jeffery Van Ness is the son of that boy.

Some time around April or May of 1944 something happened, and his rank was reduced to PFC. I have never found anyone that knows anything about this, nor does the family seem to know anything. We have pictures of him dated April 44, and he is a full Sergeant then. Soon after, he is a PFC. And died as a PFC in France.

Uncle Joe made it to Italy with the 517th. We have copies of letters showing that he did that, and fought there. He talked of being under fire and seeing the hardships on the kids over there that were innocent bystanders in the war.



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Now come his duties in Operation Dragoon. He was a Pathfinder and made the jump into LeMuy. For that action, he was awarded the Bronze Star. It appears that the Pathfinders landed in the middle of the German Communication Group, and had to engage a company sized group of Germans. The Troopers won that, however their Pathfinder Job did not complete in time for the drops.

My uncle survived until the 31st of August. He was on a forward patrol in a Jeep with members of the 442 Anti Tank which had trained in Gliders in Italy with the 517th. My Uncle was hit by machine gun fire and wounded. While being evacuated, the jeep was ambushed with mortars. Three men were killed and two wounded in that attack. My uncle was one of the dead. I just found this information, the first concrete part of his death in a book you have on the site. "Paratroopers Odyssey". If you look on page forty nine, you will see the reference to the men of the First Division, on patrol and being ambushed in a jeep of the 442 on the 31st of August. This is the date of his death. And we have a letter from Chaplain Brown of the 517th that states he died while on an important patrol. This patrol was probing the Germans after the 517th had crossed the Var River.

Again this is an odd occurrence. You would think, as famous as the 442 was that this event would at least list the names of the wounded and dead, and it would have been remembered by other troopers. Not so, as all of the information we have, we have gotten from the internet.

If you type in his name, Joseph F Van Ness, on Find A Grave, you will find his memorial and story. This was the first time we saw where the 442 incident had happened. As I said, I was reading the Odyssey this weekend and found the reference to page 49.

I have since contacted the Sons And Daughters of the 442. The last surviving anti tank member of the 442 died last summer. His mind was sharp, and he remembered a lot, but again he is now gone before I got a chance to correspond with him. I did extend a thanks to the members of that site for trying to save my uncle's life. They were intrigued with his story and enjoyed learning more of the 442 Anti Tank.

My uncle received the Bronze Star Posthumously. If you read that document , it leads you to believe he died in that action that night they jumped. We do not have his Purple Heart Document for some reason. Lost in the shuffle of time I suppose. I would imagine due to his death, the writer of the Bronze Star action, just assumed that is when he died. The Chaplain is the only one that sent anything mentioning the Patrol, which corresponds to the other info we have.

I know most of the vets are gone. However their sons, daughters, grand kids, and folks like me nephews and nieces, are still around and the veterans memories, both good and bad need to stay alive The 442 folks are really nice, and carrying on the history of their forefathers. I have given them your site for reference and they are most grateful for that.

I would love to hear back from you, and see if you can add to this story in anyway. I can send you copies of some of the documents if you like.

I am trying to find more of his records, however like many others, they were in the 73 fire.

With Regards

Robert P. Van Ness



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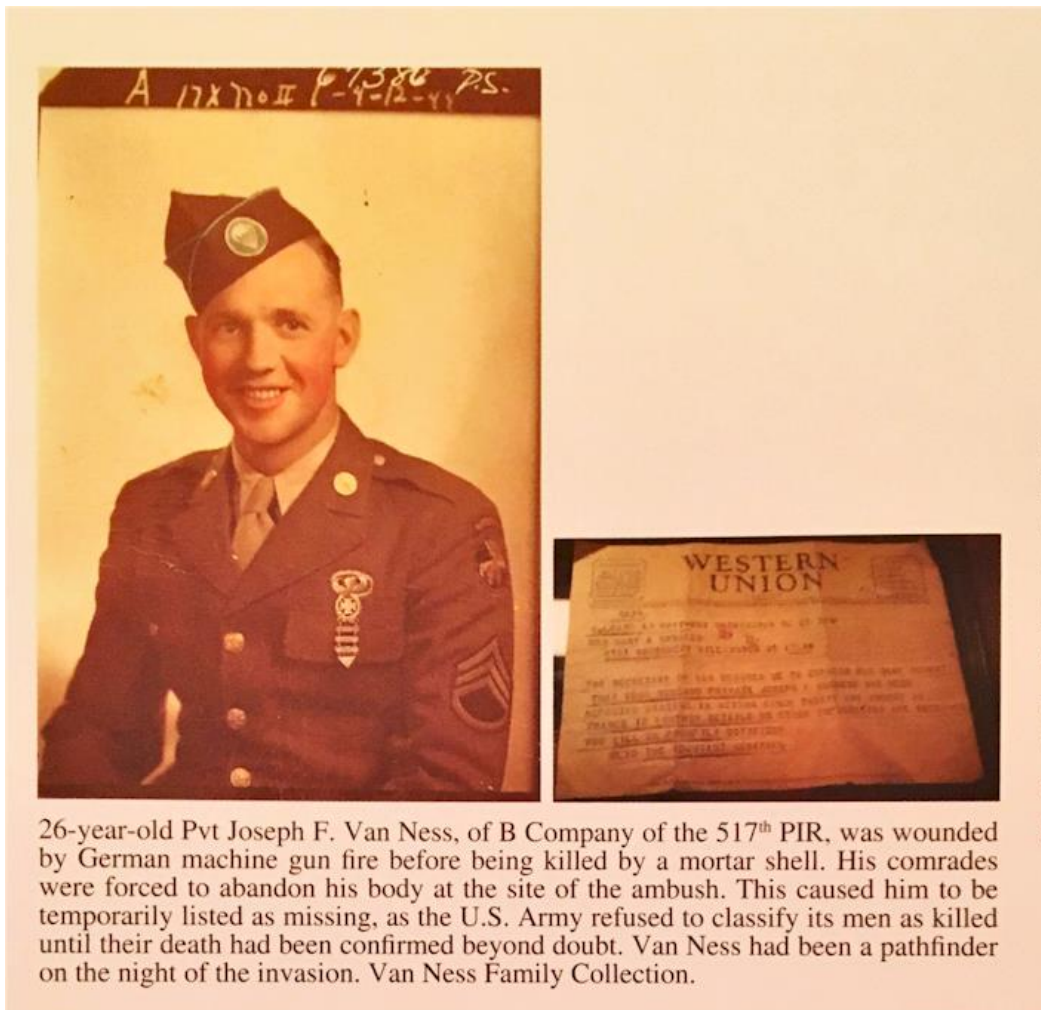
Hi Robert,

It sounds like you have already done a lot of research. I do not see any mention of Van Ness on Page 49 or anywhere else in *Paratroopers' Odyssey*. But I do see similar notes in **Jean-Loup Gassend's** book, *Operation Dragoon*. So you might even have supplied the stories and pictures to Jean-Loup.

Also regarding your mention that Van Ness was demoted from Sergeant with the 506th to PFC when he was with the 517th. I doubt that they would make him go through Camp Toccoa training twice (unless that was part of his punishment/demotion). My guess is that the demotion just occurs by default when he transferred from one unit to another. I say that only because my father, Ben Barrett, was as a Sergeant with the 515th, but requested a transfer to a unit that was certain to go overseas. When he went to Italy and joined the 517th as a replacement, he accepted a demotion to Corporal.

Regards,

Bob Barrett



26-year-old Pvt Joseph F. Van Ness, of B Company of the 517th PIR, was wounded by German machine gun fire before being killed by a mortar shell. His comrades were forced to abandon his body at the site of the ambush. This caused him to be temporarily listed as missing, as the U.S. Army refused to classify its men as killed until their death had been confirmed beyond doubt. Van Ness had been a pathfinder on the night of the invasion. Van Ness Family Collection.



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Hope all is well with you and yours. My continued thanks on the fine work you are doing keeping the story of the 517th PRCT alive.

On Friday, January 25, 2018, I was meeting with Mr. Paul Devincenzo, Veteran Outreach Officer, American Legion of Pennsylvania in Wormleysburg, PA. I was telling him Pvt. Gruwell's story and he asked me if there was any kind of memorial or plaque of some sort at the Montauroux, France cemetery stating and/or commemorating the fact that **Pvt. Gruwell** was buried in one of a number of family plots by French civilians and his remains have never been recovered. I told Mr. Devincenzo I did not believe there was anything at the cemetery.

Perhaps there should be placed such a plaque or memorial of some sort at the Montauroux cemetery in honor of Pvt. Gruwell. At least we do know what cemetery he is buried in. I would be more than willing to make a contribution to such a memorial and I believe it to be a good idea. Perhaps the remaining 517th PRCT members and their families, the American Legion, The Veterans of Foreign Wars and other organizations would contribute as well. Money could be raised in a number of ways, such as PayPal and Go Fund Me.

Let me know what you think and what I can do to be of help to make this happen.

As a side note, I am told that Pvt. Gruwell's story will be placed on the USAHEC web site when the site redesign is completed. I will let you know when that happens.

Sincerely,

Joe Figueiredo

USAHEC Volunteer

Carlisle, PA



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.

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PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM