



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2407

February 24, 2019

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

MailCall News

[Clairej Giblin](#) shared a [photo](#).

February 13 at 6:00 AM ·

20.8.16, after years of looking and airport construction.



Claire – I know this was from your trip in 2016. So what was the story with the 596th plaque at the Nice airport? Did they lose the plaque for a while, or just relocated it? -- BB



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Hi Claire,

I know you asked us all to communicate through MailCall re traveling to S. France for the 75th anniversary. I've emailed Bob at MailCall twice, several weeks apart, and my email questions haven't appeared in MailCall. Do you know any more about what communities will be having events? August 14-16 still the inclusive dates, not including the jump? Lodging places/communities that you suggest?

Thanks,

Julie Athey Black

Dates are still the same - 14,15, 16. Unfortunately, my reading French isn't fluent - but it looks like the jump might not happen this year. Sigh. Every year is different, and the information flow is never what one would hope for.

We have our flights - La Compagnie has begun business-only service Newark to Nice, with a nice sale to kick it off. I still need a car, and I asked Eric to set aside rooms at Col de l'Ange in Draguinan. We're there the 11th to the 19th.

Thanks, Claire Giblin

Hi Julie,

I did get this email to my MailCall account. Not sure why I didn't get the others, but keep me posted on events for August, and I'll do my best to let everyone else know in MailCall.

Bob Barrett

MailCall@517prct.org





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From: <https://consulfrance-chicago.org/Consul-General-of-France-presents-the-Legion-of-Honor-to-WWII-Veteran-Robert>

Consul General of France presents the Legion of Honor to WWII Veteran Robert Webber of Minnesota



On November 28, 2018, WWII veteran Robert Webber, 95, from Stillwater MN received the French Legion of Honor in recognition for his contribution to the liberation of France during WWII.

The presentation ceremony was held at the VFW Post 23 in Stillwater in the presence of Mayor Ted Kozlowski, State Representative Bob Dettmer, Colonel Donald G. Patton, Retired U.S Army, and Honorary Consul of France in Minnesota, Christina Selander Bouzouina. Mr. Webber was also surrounded by family, friends, and veterans of foreign wars including of WWII.

Pfc. Webber enlisted in the U.S Army in March 1943, at age 19. After completing his training, he was attached to the 1st Battalion, 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. He was a member of the heavy mortar platoon where he was a mortar man.

On May 17, 1944 he boarded the Santa Rosa and left Virginia for Europe. He arrived in Naples, and fought for weeks in Italy before moving to the French front.

On August 14-15, Operation Dragoon was launched. At around 4:30am Pfc. Webber jumped into Southern France near Le Muy (Var). His first mission was to take the Roque Rousse hill and set mortars to cover approaches from the west of Les Arcs. He fought on the front lines for more than 90 days, including 30 days at Col de Braus, and Sospel in Alpes Maritimes, near the Italian border. On October 25, he was wounded in the face and neck by shrapnel. He was hospitalized and returned to his platoon a few days later. In the late fall 1944, his unit was trucked to Belgium, in order to return to the U.S but Operation Nordwind was launched by the enemy forces. The 517th was reactivated and sent to the Battle of the Bulge. Pfc. Webber was unable to join his unit due to a bout of malaria. He was hospitalized and would not return to the front. He was honorably discharged from the Army in October 1945.



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From: <https://www.twincities.com/2018/11/28/a-hero-of-two-nations/>



A hero of two nations: A Stillwater WWII paratrooper gets France's highest honor

The French government on Wednesday presented its highest honor to a 95-year-old Stillwater man who fought in World War II.

On behalf of French President Emmanuel Macron, the Consul General of France, Guillaume Lacroix, pinned the Legion of Honor medal on Bob Webber, calling him “a true French hero.”

“What you did was enormous,” Lacroix told Webber during the midday ceremony at the Stillwater VFW in Oak Park Heights. “Without you, without your sacrifice, the French flag that is flying there would not be flying today. There would be no France today. It is as simple as that.”

Webber was 21 years old in 1944 when he parachuted into southern France behind German lines as part of the Allied invasion of France. He and 5,000 other members of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment — dubbed the “Battling Buzzards” — landed near Le Muy, France, on Aug. 15, 1944, during Operation Dragoon.

“It was 4:30 in the morning, and it was still dark,” Webber said in an interview before the ceremony. “You couldn’t see the ground or anything. While everybody was coming in to land, you could hear what sounded like splashing. It was trees and bushes that we were landing in. I landed in small brush. I was one of the lucky ones.”

The paratroopers who landed on water weren’t so fortunate, said Bruce Webber, Webber’s son. “If you landed on water, you were dead,” he said. “You would just go straight to the bottom.”

Webber, a member of the mortar patrol, had to parachute in with a 40-inch plate for the mortar, Bruce Webber said.

“They had to carry the ammunition, the mortar,” he said. “In his platoon, there were four separate mortars, so you can imagine the work they had to do. They pushed the Germans all the way up to the Italian border.”

About a month after he parachuted into France, Webber was wounded when a German mortar shell exploded in his face and neck.

Webber spent the next two years pulling pieces of shrapnel out of his skin “as the metal worked its way out,” Bruce Webber said. “His commanding officer, (William) ‘Wild Bill’ Boyle, made him get in a jeep and took him to the infirmary to get patched up, but he went right back to the unit. He’s a tough old buzzard.”

Webber previously received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star and other awards for his service during World War II.

FRANCE'S HIGHEST DISTINCTION

On Wednesday, he also became a knight. The Order of the Legion of Honor (Ordre national de la Legion d'honneur) is the oldest French national order, established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, “when Minnesota was a French territory,” Lacroix said.

“I’m here to express our gratitude,” he said. “Unfortunately, I’m not here to reclaim our land.”



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“We all know that Mr. Webber not only has accomplished the deeds and merits to make him eligible, but we all know that it took too long for him to be recognized,” Lacroix said. “But the recognition that you are getting is forever. This is a symbol of the forever gratitude of the French people to you, sir, to your family, to your community, to your people, to your generation — America’s greatest generation. While you are a hero, a true American hero, today you are becoming a true French hero — a hero of two nations.”

Webber grew up in Stillwater and was drafted into the Army in March 1943. He said he volunteered to be a paratrooper because they were paid an extra \$50 a month. “He can be pretty thrifty,” Bruce Webber said. “He was a product of the Depression.”

Webber was sent to Camp Toccoa, an Army paratrooper camp in Georgia, for basic training. He had to run seven miles up Mount Currahee carrying his rifle, parachute and full field pack, he said.

He was then sent to Fort Benning for parachute training, where paratroopers were required to jump off towers of increasing height each day. After five jumps, the paratroopers would earn their “wings,” he said.

“It was very tough,” Bruce Webber said. “It was very difficult to make it. Many were weeded out. If you couldn’t make it as a paratrooper, a lot of the troops got put into the gliders, which came in after their jump.”

“They were made of nothing but a piece of plywood and cloth,” Bob Webber said.

“Many of them crashed and killed the guys before they even got to fight,” Bruce Webber said.

After the war, Webber worked as a streetcar driver and a bus driver. He and his wife, Shirley, later owned and operated the TomTom Resort in Balsam Lake, Wis. The couple had three children; son Randy, of Balsam Lake, died in March. Daughter Barbara Kruse lives in Stillwater; Bruce Webber lives in West Palm Beach, Fla.

After attending a reunion of the 517th in France in August 2016, Webber learned he might be eligible for the French Legion of Honor. Bruce Webber said the process took almost 1½ years.



Supported by his son, Bruce Webber, left, Stillwater resident Bob Webber, center, is congratulated after being presented with the French Legion of Honor medal by Consul General of France, Guillaume Lacroix, right, during a ceremony Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018 at VFW Post 323 in Oak Park Heights. Webber, 95, served during World War II with the American 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment paratroopers and was among the paratroopers to drop into southern France behind German lines. He parachuted near Le Muy, France on Aug. 15, 1944 with Operation Dragoon as part of the Allied invasion of France. (Jean Pieri / Pioneer Press)



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A historical photo of World War II paratrooper Bob Webber is displayed, along with other memorabilia, on a table as the Stillwater resident is presented with the French Legion of Honor medal in a ceremony Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018 at VFW Post 323 in Oak Park Heights. Webber, 95, served during World War II with the American 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment paratroopers and was among the paratroopers to drop into southern France behind German lines. He parachuted near Le Muy, France on Aug. 15, 1944 with Operation Dragoon as part of the Allied invasion of France. The Consul General of France, Guillaume Lacroix, traveled from the French Consulate in Chicago for the pinning ceremony. (Jean Pieri / Pioneer Press)



The Consul General of France, Guillaume Lacroix, left, makes a champagne toast to Stillwater resident, Bob Webber, 95, after he pinned the French Legion of Honor medal on him during a ceremony Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018 at VFW Post 323 in Oak Park Heights. Webber served during World War II with the American 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment paratroopers and was among the paratroopers to drop into southern France behind German lines. He parachuted near Le Muy, France on Aug. 15, 1944 with Operation Dragoon as part of the Allied invasion of France. They are surrounded by, from left, Mel Dahlberg, a fellow paratrooper from the 517th regiment, Christina Selander-Bouzouina, an honorary consul for France in Minnesota, Bruce Webber, Bob's son, Ted

Kozlowski, Stillwater mayor, and Barb Kruse, Bob's daughter. (Jean Pieri / Pioneer Press)



The World War II uniform of Stillwater resident Bob Webber is displayed for a ceremony where he received the French Legion of Honor medal Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018 at VFW Post 323 in Oak Park Heights. Webber, 95, served during World War II with the American 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment paratroopers and was among the paratroopers to drop into southern France behind German lines. He parachuted near Le Muy, France on Aug. 15, 1944 with Operation Dragoon as part of the Allied invasion of France. (Jean Pieri / Pioneer Press)



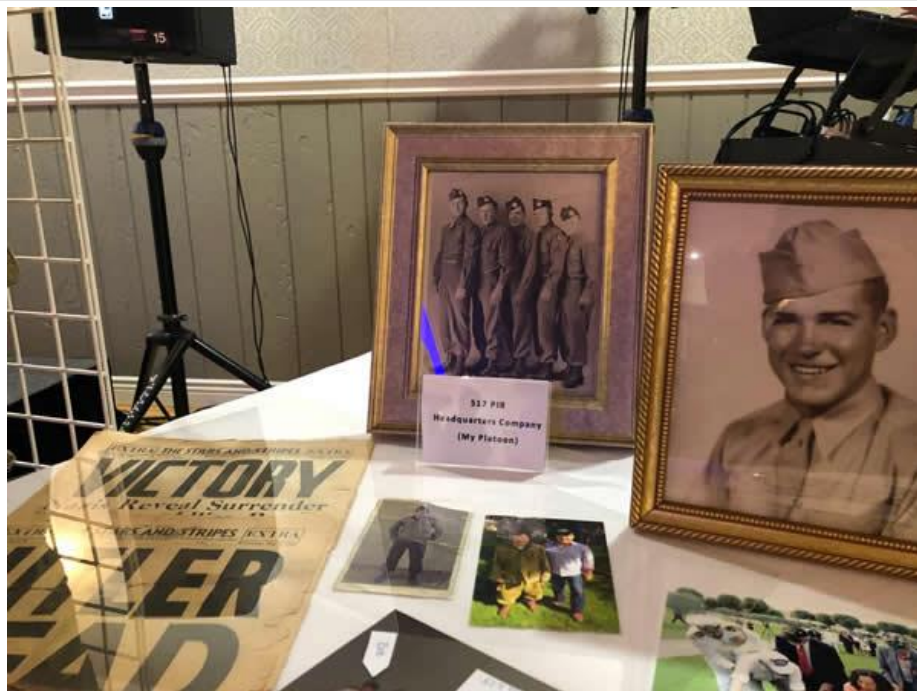
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Stillwater resident Bob Webber, 95, is congratulated after receiving the French Legion of Honor medal during a ceremony Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018 at VFW Post 323 in Oak Park Heights. Webber was among the American paratroopers to drop into southern France behind German lines in August 1944.. (Jean Pieri / Pioneer Press)



STILLWATER (WCCO) — In a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall, spilling over with guests, 95-year-old Bob Webber was at the center of attention.





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For a video of the ceremony on the local news, see:

<http://www.fox9.com/news/stillwater-veteran-awarded-france-s-highest-military-recognition>



I can't tell you how much I enjoyed the pictures of the people putting the flags on the graves in Pennsylvania. If they are reading, THANK YOU!

Love the Mail Call!

Juliana Stonis

daughter of **John A. Stonis** (H Company)

This is to let veterans of the 517th PRCT, family and friends know that our dad, **COL Thomas R. Cross**, will be formally inducted into the US Army Airborne Rigger Hall of Fame at **1PM , February 25, 2019**. In addition, the Rigger Hall of Fame Room will be renamed in his honor.

For anyone interested in attending, the ceremony will be held at:

US Army Quartermaster School
Aerial Delivery and Field Services Department
Building 6025, 710 A Ave
1st Floor, Lewi Auditorium
Fort Lee, Virginia

Dad will be linked into the ceremony and watching from Florida.

Tom Cross Jr.



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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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