



## 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team



### MailCall No. 2411

March 24, 2019

*517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment  
460<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Artillery Battalion  
596<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Engineer Company*

### *MailCall News*

In the last MailCall, we included some notes about the 551<sup>st</sup> PIB, which will be represented at the ceremonies in France for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary events in August. Some of you may remember that **Col. Rupert Graves**, Commander of the 517<sup>th</sup> throughout the European campaign, briefly commanded the 551<sup>st</sup> at Camp Mackall before being assigned to the 517<sup>th</sup>. Apparently, there was no love lost between Col. Graves and the 551<sup>st</sup>. The 551 was later part of both Operation Dragoon, and during the Battle of the Bulge was temporarily assigned under Col. Graves command again. There are a number of writings from the 551<sup>st</sup> that they feel they were slighted by Col. Graves during the Bulge. – BB

From <https://551pib.us/history/>

Their original Commander, the beloved now **Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Joerg**, left the Battalion for a new assignment at Fort Benning. His replacement was **LTC Rupert Graves**, who was the complete opposite of Joerg. LTC Graves did not identify at all with the independent enthusiasm of the GOYAs. Discipline and AWOL problems were rampant, and the GOYA's distaste of the totalitarian culture and rule of collective punishment that Graves created within the unit was clear. After a disastrous night drop in February 1944, where eight Paratroopers of the 551<sup>st</sup> died after their C-47 mistakenly dropped them into Kinney-Cameron Lake, a secret inquiry indirectly put the blame on Graves for poor planning, and swiftly reassigned him in March 1944. Shortly thereafter, LTC Joerg returned to the 551<sup>st</sup> as their Commander, and wasted no time into getting the GOYAs back on track as an effective fighting unit (Orfalea, 1997).

#### Operation DRAGOON

Shortly after LTC Joerg's return to the 551<sup>st</sup> in March, the Battalion received movement orders to Europe, again as an independent unit. New gear was issued, equipment was packed up, and in April 1944, the GOYAs of the 551<sup>st</sup> embarked on another troopship destined for Sicily via Algeria and Naples, Italy (Orfalea, 1997). They arrived in May 1944 and spent most of June and July training for the combat jump mission that had been rumored to be anywhere from Southern France to Yugoslavia. In July 1944, they moved to a small town 20 miles southwest of Rome and told of "their" D-Day. Staging out of airfields around Rome, the 551<sup>st</sup>, as part of the hastily organized First Airborne Task Force, prepared for the jump into Southern France on 15 August 1944 as part of Operation DRAGOON, the Allied landings in Southern France. The First Airborne Task Force, or FABTF for short, was comprised of the 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, the battle-hardened 509<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry (on their fourth combat jump), the 550<sup>th</sup> (from their days in Panama and who were now a Glider Infantry battalion), and the



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GOYAs of the 551<sup>st</sup> (Devlin, 1979). Shortly after 1800hrs on 15 August 1944, the 826 Officer and Enlisted Paratroopers of the 551<sup>st</sup> conducted the first successful daytime combat parachute assault in history, as part of the second wave of paratroops to jump during DRAGOON, near the town of Le Muy. Immediately after jumping from his C-47, Sergeant (SGT) Doug Dillard, A Company's communications Noncommissioned Officer (NCO), "surveyed the landscape and I could see chutes all over the place, above and below me" (Morgan, 1984, p. 188). The 551<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry's objective, the successful seizing of the city of Draguignan on 17 August, included the capture of General Ludwig Bieringer, the first German general captured in World War II (Orfalea, 1997). The 551<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry, after months of training, disappointment, and frustration, had finally proven themselves an effective unit in combat.

\* \* \*

### Attack on Rochelival

On 02 January 1945, the 551<sup>st</sup> was under operational control of Colonel (COL) Graves and his 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment. This was the same unpopular COL Graves from the GOYAs days at Camp Mackall, assigned the 551<sup>st</sup> mission on 03 January, the first day of the planned Allied counteroffensive. The 551<sup>st</sup> crossed the line of departure on 03 January and attacked southeast from Basse-Bodeux (Orfalea, 1997). On 06 January 1945, the 551<sup>st</sup> moved from operational control under the 517<sup>th</sup>, to that of the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. The GOYA's Commander, LTC Joerg, looked forward to working with COL Reuben Tucker's 504<sup>th</sup> and hoped for better support than was received from the 517<sup>th</sup>. This was not to be the case. LTC Joerg began to sense that things would not be better with the 504<sup>th</sup>, maybe even worse. The Division staff of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne gave vital significance to the capture of any intact bridges over the Salm River, and pushed units to secure them, to include the attached 551<sup>st</sup> (Tucker, 1999).

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Here is some info from *Paratroopers' Odyssey* about the contribution and sacrifices of the 551<sup>st</sup> PIB in the Bulge, especially in their final days:

The 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry had now closed along the Salm and was given responsibility for the entire sector, picking up 3/517 and the 551<sup>st</sup> in place. The only enemy force remaining west of the Salm was at Rochelival, a tiny village close to the river bank one and a half miles southeast of Bergeval. The 551<sup>st</sup> was given the job of cleaning out this pocket.

On January 7<sup>th</sup> the 551<sup>st</sup> attacked. Tree-bursting enemy artillery shells took a heavy toll, killing the widely-admired Battalion Commander Lt Colonel Wood Joerg. The left assault company was decimated by flanking machine gun fire while crossing an open field. Fighting almost to the last man, the 551<sup>st</sup> seized the village, killing an estimated 50 Germans and capturing over 200. Only 100 to 150 men remained out of over 600 that had crossed the line of departure four days before. It was a tragic finish for a fine Battalion. \*

\* Two weeks later the 551<sup>st</sup> was deactivated and surviving members were sent as individual replacements to other airborne units.





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From: <https://www.facebook.com/CampToccoaAtCurrahee/>

Camp Toccoa at Currahee, Inc.

March 19 at 7:49 AM ·

As we put the finishing touches on the “Barracks Store” Gift Shop at Camp Toccoa At Currahee, we are looking forward to talking with anyone interested in serving as a “Camp Ambassador.” This entails volunteering 2 hours of your time to help promote the Camp and its projects, but more importantly, to tell the story of the “Toccoa Men.”

We will be holding a get together on April 13th at 10:00am at the Camp, located at 2351 Ayersville Road, across from Patterson Pump. Anyone interested in hearing more about this opportunity to serve your community and honor the men that trained at the Camp. Please contact **Brenda Carlan** at 706-282-5055.



Thank you in advance for your interest in helping with this project. Currahee



Camp Toccoa has made great improvements and we are ready to open the gates on Friday and Saturday starting this April.

If you are interested in donating 3 or 6 hours a month of your time please attend this meeting for information or call or email if you can not attend but are interested in helping.

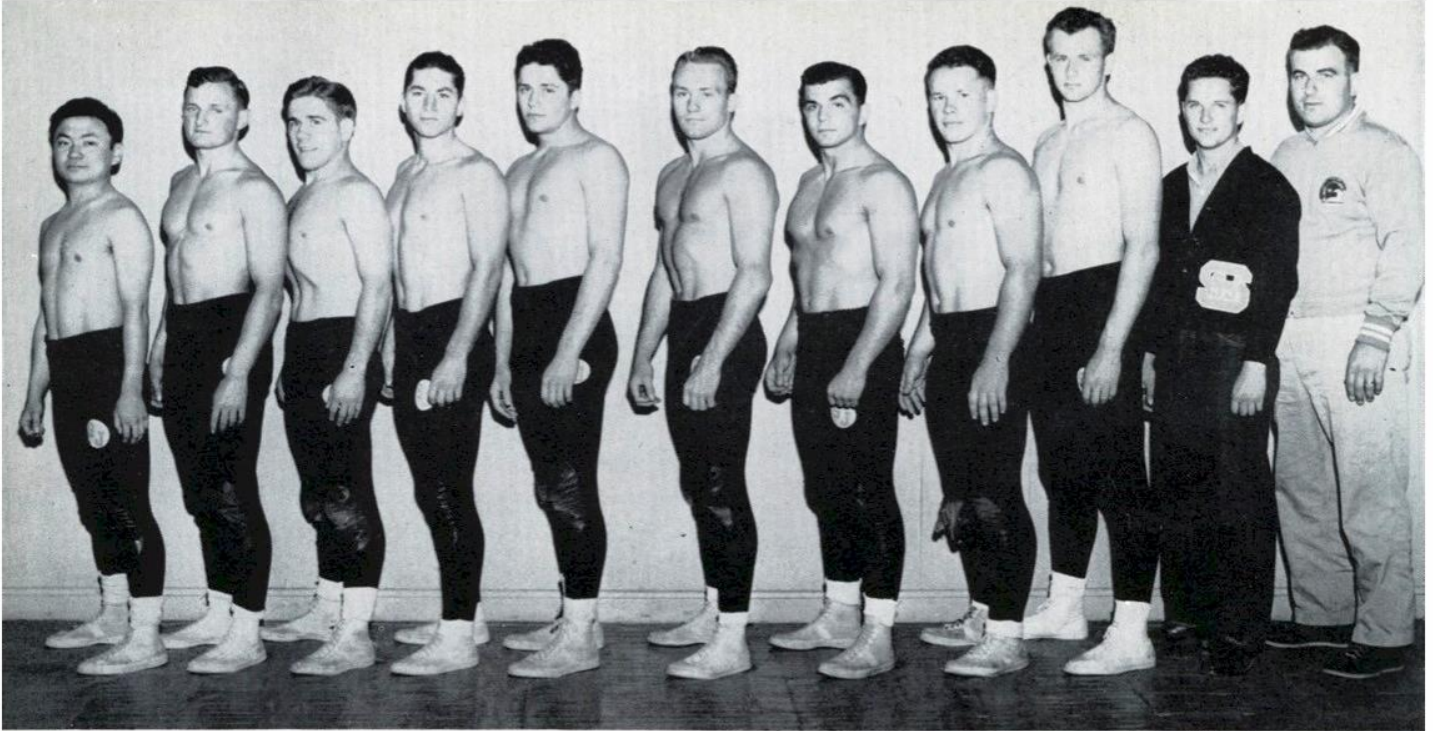
Remember Saturday April 13th 10am at Camp Toccoa at Currahee. 706-282-5055 or [contact@toccoahistory.com](mailto:contact@toccoahistory.com)



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Here's a copy of the photo of **Dave Hines'** 1941-42 wrestling team at San Jose State College. Hines is in the center of the picture.

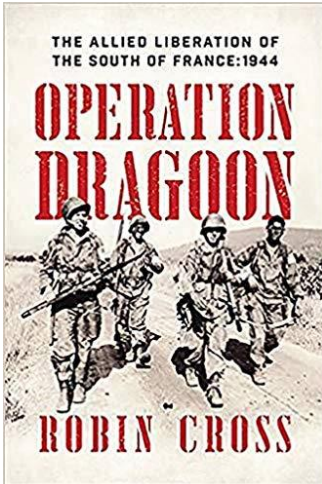
**Frank Marqua**



Left to Right—Bob Sakamoto, Fred Albright, Ivan Olsen, Leo Raiche, John Castleman, Dave Hines, Hans Wiedenhofer, Ken Bailey, John Dahl, Bob Bareuther, Sam Della Maggiore, coach.



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### Operation Dragoon: The Allied Liberation of the South of France: 1944

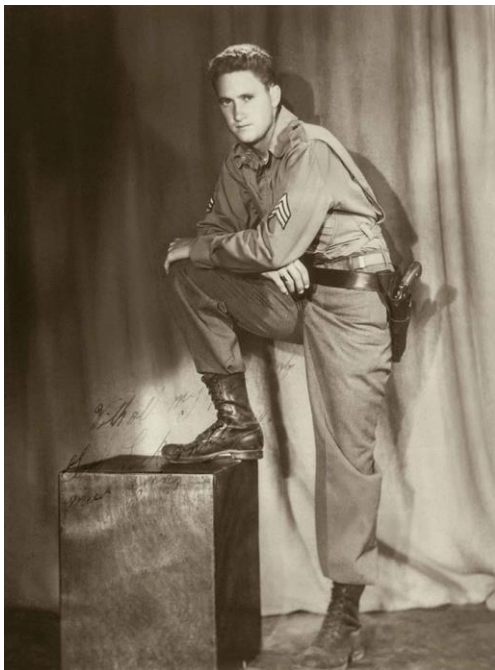
by [Robin Cross](#)

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Short excerpt, Page 149 --->

In the afternoon of August 15, Frederick organized attacks on Le Muy and Les Arcs, four miles to the west of Le Muy. Les Arcs had been briefly occupied by the FFI after the withdrawal of its German garrison. It was later occupied and secured by all three battalions of the 517th PIR, who beat off a succession of German counterattacks on the following day. It was a small-scale but grueling battle. Colonel Zais's 3rd Battalion, which had landed some twenty-five miles away, was the last on the scene, on August 15, gathering strength as it marched on its objective, following a power line that took it in the right direction. By the time 517th arrived near Les Arcs, the battalion was almost back to full strength. However, the rigors of the jump and a night march had been exhausting. Moreover, because they had no transport the men were carrying all of their equipment on their backs. After snatching some sleep, the 3rd Battalion went in later that night, supported by howitzers and mortars of 406th FAB. When the sun came up, the town had been cleared of Germans, who had left behind their dead and wounded. Later that morning Zais was paid a visit by Colonel Graves, and the two men ate Provençal tomatoes in the backyard of a farmhouse while they discussed the consolidation the defenses at les Arcs and moving against the Toulon-Saint-Raphaël corridor.

### *Sgt. William M. "Bob" McGary, F Company*



Sgt. William M. "Bob" McGary of F Company, 517th PRCT passed away on 17 March 2019.

Photo courtesy of Sgt. McGary's family.



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## Administrivia

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- 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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*"My son. Five days old. Good-lookin' kid, ain't he?"*