



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

## MailCall No. 2421

Sept 8, 2019

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

## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Dragoon Ceremonies

From Montauroux, France - There to honor the new plaque for **Pvt Robert Gruwell (MIA/KIA)**



Robert R. Gruwell, 21, of G Company of the 517<sup>th</sup> PIR, was apparently killed his own grenade when he tried to throw it into the German ambulance that was hunched beneath Callian on the morning of the invasion. Virginia Bunkofske Collection.

See: [http://517prct.org/bios/robert\\_r\\_gruwell/Pvt\\_Gruwell\\_Final\\_Draft\\_V3.pdf](http://517prct.org/bios/robert_r_gruwell/Pvt_Gruwell_Final_Draft_V3.pdf)



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More from Montauroux. Visiting the home used as the field hospital, followed by aperitif and flowers!

The owner has restored the home and knows some of the stories, and shared that one dying man asked one of the girls caring for them to help him walk to the terrace to see the view before dying. She did, and he died shortly thereafter.

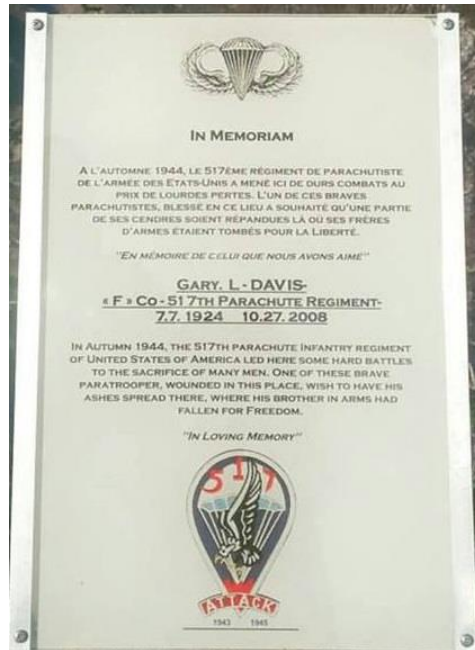
When we'd delivered the proclamations from the 517 10 years ago, the diminutive adjoint mayor received us. Now retired, she was there and remembered us.





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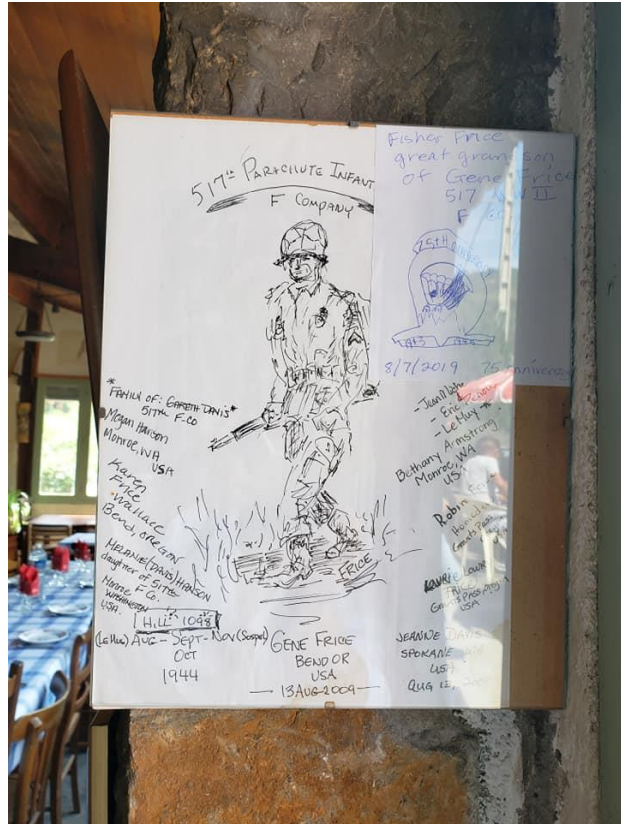
At Col de Braus. Gareth "Gary" Davis (F Company) honored. Retracing steps.





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More at Col de Braus



*Jude 12 Post 2013  
70 + 17120*

*Merci beaucoup for a wonderful reception of the unwavering of the 517<sup>th</sup> Plaque.*

*Leo P. Lear*

**PRIVATE COLLECTOR WANTS TO BUY OR TRADE OLD FISHING TACKLE** WOODS PLUG ROD REEL AND

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**517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team**  
517th Parachute Infantry Regiment  
468th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion  
396th Parachute Combat Engineer Company  
www.517prct.org  
1944 - 2009  
65ème Anniversaire de la Libération

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**517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team**  
1944 - 2013: 69 years of friendship between the people of Europe and the men and families of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team  
www.517prct.org



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

Valbourges!

Allan Johnson with Frédéric Hermann



Claire Giblin, with Gini Fields, Allan and with Frédéric Hermann -->



**Jim Giblin and Bruce Broudy, son of Capt. Joe Broudy (A Co.).**



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Les Arcs. Thank you for remembering.



August 15, 2019. Visiting the Rhône American Cemetery to pay respects, especially at the graves of the four 596 Parachute Engineer Company: **Patrick Michaels, Ernest Coffelt, Herbert McLamb and Henry Wikins.**

It was a rehearsal for the next day's events, and our current serving military honor guards were there. They all met Allan, received a 517 anniversary patch, and had photos with him. He's always so happy to meet our service members and thank them personally. These are the unexpected moments.

Thank you to Rhône Superintendent **Andy Anderson.**

Also pictured, Secretary Matts of the ABMC and press liaison Hélène





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American Battle Monuments Commission is in Rhone American Cemetery and Memorial - August 15



ABMC Secretary **William Matz** delivers remarks at the 75th Anniversary Ceremony of the Allied Landings in Southern France

“The world knows well the names Normandy and Omaha Beach. But, today, we remember beaches named Rosie, Camel, Delta, Alpha, Garbo, Romeo and Sitka, across which U.S. and French divisions launched Operation Dragoon, the second phase of the Allied plan to liberate France.” – ABMC Secretary William Matz

#ICYMI Last Thursday, we remembered the sacrifices made during the second #DDay landings in France during #WWII. 75 years after the allied campaign referred to as Operation Dragoon, dignitaries, military and civic leaders, and French and American citizens gathered to show that #WeRemember.

[U.S. Embassy France](#) [French Embassy in the U.S.](#) [U.S. Department of Defense \(DoD\)](#) [U.S. European Command \(EUCOM\)](#) [U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. Sixth Fleet](#) [Ministère des Armées](#)

Photo credits: U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Casey Dinnison



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Claire and Jim Giblin, Allan Johnson (596<sup>th</sup>) with Patricia and Roland Orenge in Sospel



I'm having Allan go through the new book, and asking him to put a Post-It on important pages. Running out of Post-Its!

Wow, **Loïc Jankowiak**. Great job!

Claire





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Loïc Jankowiak

August 18 at 5:33 PM ·

Coffee if I didn't talk with everyone this year, I met with people who were interested for this 75th anniversary of the landing of Provence. Many families of the 517th prct, 509th & 551st GDP were present. I met with Teresa Klisiewicz Johnson, @ Eric Buchanan, **Karen Wallace Frice**, **the Ross brothers**, Mardi Morrow, Brad Hicks and many others. I ' Connaisais' most of these people through the net and I finally got to meet them.

I thank the city hall of la motte and that of the arcs for allowing me to promote my book ' **the 517th's gang** ', as well as Eric for allowing me to introduce it to la motte and to Valbourgès.

Thanks to these commemorations and their existence, I have been able to review many others such as Claire and her father **Allan Johnson** (596th PEC) and be able to talk again about her experiences. I also saw tryggi, member of the 509th Parachute Infantry Association and former veteran of the unit. I have also seen many other people

Thank you also to Jean Mi for allowing me to present my book at his exhibition at the arcs-Sur-Argens.

Thank you to all of you for making this august so extra ordinary every year.



**Loïc Jankowiak and Brad Hicks, son of General Fredericks** (commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Task Force)





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As I shared a day or two ago, we were able to attend anniversary commemorations in beautiful Saint-Cézaire! 5 years ago. Unfortunately, we were not able to stay long enough to do it again this year. However, I am delighted that **the Dallas family** was able to make it and got to meet the wonderful and warm people of Saint-Cézaire!

Thank you for remembering!

**Claire Giblin**

This year, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the landing of Provence, we had the very great honour to receive, in our modest village of Saint-Cezaire, children and children of **Sgt Frank Dallas**, from 517 Th prct.

**Frank Dallas** is the skydiver who during the assault on the village, took the initiative to climb alone a cliff in order to get around and silence a German machine gun nest blocking the advance of his company. He will later make a brilliant military career, will end up a Lieutenant-Colonel of the us army, and will be one of the creators of the us special forces, the famous green



JM Blum



Frank Dallas in WW2



LT. Colonel Frank Dallas  
back in the 70/80's



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



### Airborne Command

(US airborne French reenactment group)

In honor of First Airborne Task Force.  
With our brothers [@wwiadt](#)  
[#StrongTogether](#)



From **Jean Mi Soldi's** Facebook page:

See the result of 35 years of influence in my dad and mum . 😊😊😊. look the beautiful cake they bring home for lunch dedicated ..merci papa Michel and mama Josiane UM ❤️ FR ❤️ UMUM je crois que j'ai un peu trop d'influence sur papa et maman



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A few more photos from southern France from **Karen (Frice) Wallace**, daughter of **Gene Frice**, F Company.





# STARS AND STRIPES®

## Service members mark 75th anniversary of often-overlooked WWII invasion of southern France



Steven Hill poses next to the grave of his uncle, Tech. 4 Zeb Murphy Banks, at Rhone American Cemetery in Draguignan, France, Thursday, Aug. 15, 2019. Banks was an Army tanker who was killed Aug. 28, 1944, when his tank hit a mine. Hill came to the cemetery to attend Friday's ceremony marking the 75th anniversary of Operation Dragoon.

MICHAEL ABRAMS/STARS AND STRIPES

By [MICHAEL ABRAMS](#) | STARS AND STRIPES Published: August 16, 2019

DRAGUIGNAN, France — A ceremony at Rhone American Cemetery on Friday remembered those who fought in Operation Dragoon, the Allied invasion of southern France 75 years ago.



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Looking across the graves of more than 850 fallen troops, French and American dignitaries spoke of sacrifice and bravery in an operation that is often overlooked in the annals of World War II.

Simon Hankinson, the U.S. Consul General in Marseille, noted that when he was researching the battle he found just three books in English on it, but hundreds on the Normandy invasion.

Operation Dragoon was planned to happen simultaneously with the Normandy invasion, but a shortage of resources — mainly ships — led to the operation being canceled.

With Normandy a success and a need for more ports to bring men and equipment to the Continent, the plan was revived with the objective of capturing the ports of Toulon and Marseille, trapping the German army in France and linking up with Allied armies advancing in the north.

It was launched Aug. 15, 1944, and within a month, on Sept. 12, troops advancing north from the Cote d'Azur met up with troops from the Normandy invasion near Dijon. Most of France was free.



On the 75th anniversary of Operation Dragoon, the World War II invasion of southern France, veteran Allan Johnson stands among the graves at Rhone American Cemetery in Draguignan, France, and pays his respects to Pvt. Henry Wikins, a fellow member of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team.

MICHAEL ABRAMS/STARS AND STRIPES



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But the success came at a cost. In his speech, Rear Adm. Matthew Zirkle said that the freedom the U.S. and Europe enjoy today was “earned by the blood and sacrifice of those interred in these hallowed grounds, and we cannot and will not forget their sacrifice.”

The day before the ceremony, Allan Johnson, 95, walked through the cemetery, stopping at a few graves to honor members of his unit. One was that of Pvt. Henry Wikins, a Jewish soldier whose body, when recovered, showed signs of being tortured by the Nazis.

As a young private, Johnson, an engineer with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, jumped into France in the early hours of Aug. 15. His unit was supposed to land in a triangle made up of the towns of Le Muy, La Motte and Les Arcs, but came down near Callian, nearly 15 miles off the mark.

“We didn’t know where we were,” Johnson said, recalling the day 75 years ago. “First people we saw were young girls who were leaning against the wall, giggling.”

Eventually his unit gathered and got going.

Families and friends of others who fell during the operation attended the ceremony. Among them was Steven Hill, a college history teacher in Raleigh, N.C. He came to honor his uncle, Tech. 4 Zeb Murphy Banks, an Army tanker who was killed Aug. 28, 1944, when his tank hit a mine.

Hill had visited once before, 20 years ago with his father. When he saw the coverage of the D-Day anniversary in June he decided to come to the ceremony. “It’s the 75th anniversary, so I’ve got to do this,” he said before visiting his uncle’s grave.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Jared Brannon, a saxophonist with the U.S. Naval Forces Europe Band from Naples, Italy, thought it was the most touching ceremony he has attended.

“To be surrounded by people who gave their lives was moving,” he said. “And being near the French Resistance fighters, who fought the oppression of the Nazis, was inspiring.”

Following the speeches there was a wreath-laying, the playing of taps, a rifle salute, a flyover of a Ramstein Air Base, Germany, C-130 Hercules aircraft and the playing of the national anthems before the U.S. Naval Forces Europe color guard retired the colors.

“It was an outstanding ceremony,” said Spc. John Cruz, a member of the firing detail from the U.S. Army’s 1st Inland Cargo Transfer Company in Kaiserslautern, Germany. “It was a great honor to be here.”



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## *A Remembrance to the Citizens of Provence from the U.S.A. 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Team Association*

MEN OF THE 517<sup>th</sup> PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM PARACHUTED INTO PROVENCE ON 15 AUGUST 1944.  
THEY FOUGHT GERMAN FORCES FOR 95 DAYS IN A SERIES OF ENGAGEMENTS:

• LA MOTTE • LES ARCS • FAYENCE • CALLIAN • SAINT CEZAIRE • GRASSE  
• SAINT VALLIER • LA ROQUETTE • COL DE BRAUS • SOSPEL

THE TEAM SUFFERED 500 CASUALTIES AND HAD 101 MEN KILLED IN ACTION.  
THESE MEN AND THE SACRIFICES OF FRENCH CITIZENS SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

### *Killed In Action*

#### MEN OF THE 517<sup>th</sup> PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT KILLED DURING THE LIBERATION OF PROVENCE

Capt. JOSEPH T. MCGEEVER	PFC MARVIN C. BELL	PFC HAROLD I. SHUMAKER	Pvt. LAYERNE LA BAR, JR.
Lt. ARTHUR W. RIDLER	PFC WILLIAM BUK	PFC JACK WHITFIELD	Pvt. DANIEL T. LOPEZ
Lt. HAROLD M. FREEMAN	PFC DON M. BURNSIDE	PFC JOE E. YORK	Pvt. WILLIAM F. THORNG
Lt. MAURICE J. MILEY	PFC JOE CASTANON	PFC ELMER J. ANDERSON	Pvt. WALTER VANDERPOOL
Lt. ALBERT M. ROBINSON	PFC ANTHONY S. CELLI	Pvt. RICHARD B. BEDHARZ	Pvt. WILBURN M. KERSEY
Lt. CHARLES J. SADLO	PFC HENRY A. CIMER	Pvt. JULIUS J. RICHMOND	Pvt. CHARLES C. LEMEN
Lt. HILLARD B. THOMAS	PFC HECTOR H. COLO	Pvt. LYNNWOOD W. CROSS	Pvt. JOHN J. POLINSKY
Sgt. EDGAR R. ATTEBERY	PFC ANTHONY A. FABRICK	Pvt. HAROLD D. SEEGAR	Pvt. JOSEPH J. REGINATO
Sgt. JOHN E. GAUNCE	PFC JESSE D. GOSWICK	Pvt. ALBERT J. ERNST	Pvt. HOWARD L. RICHMOND
Sgt. KENNETH R. MATTICE	PFC DAVID B. HAIGHT	Pvt. GEORGE J. SECICINA	Pvt. JOSEPH E. O'BRIEN
Sgt. ROBERT J. MILLER	PFC J.B. HAMPTON	Pvt. ROBERT R. HAMTHORNE	Pvt. ELMER J. CARLSON
Sgt. ARNOLD C. RIDOUT	PFC LOWELL HENDERSON, JR.	Pvt. WALLACE A. MONTGOMERY	Pvt. WALTER M. HOFSSOMMER
T/4 HOMER C. BEAVER	PFC HAROLD J. LEWIS	Pvt. JOSEPH F. VAN NESS	Pvt. JOHN A. STATT
T/4 ALTON L. SHANHEFFELT	PFC TRAVIS V. McDONALD	Pvt. CARL G. SALMON	Pvt. JOHN J. CAMPBELL
Cpl. JAMES M. ARREDONDS	PFC MELVIN W. McLEY	Pvt. AL D. BAGGETT	Pvt. VERNON D. DIRKSON
Cpl. DANIEL A. FISHER	PFC DANIEL L. OGRIENSKI	Pvt. JOHN W. CLARK	Pvt. STANLEY E. RADOM
Cpl. RICHARD A. JAMME	PFC MARYIN R. OLIVER	Pvt. JAMES L. WALTON	Pvt. RICHARD SAILOR
Cpl. ARTHUR E. SHERMAN	PFC JAMES J. PACEY	Pvt. ALTON L. ALLEN	Pvt. WILLIS A. WOODCOCK
Cpl. JOSEPH M. STEWART	PFC WILLIAM RICHARDS	Pvt. JOHN FOUTS	Pvt. THOMAS A. NAYLOR
T/S WILLIAM F. BALDWIN	PFC CHARLES F. SANFORD	Pvt. FREDERICK M. JOHN	Pvt. RAYMOND F. THOMPSON
T/S CASIMER W. SZCZECH			

#### MEN OF THE 480<sup>th</sup> PARACHUTE ARTILLERY BATTALION KILLED DURING THE LIBERATION OF PROVENCE

Lt. HARRY F. MOORE	PFC ROBERT W. BROWN	PFC PHILIP M. KEMMNER	Pvt. CHARLES H. TATRO
Lt. DUANE L. SMITH	PFC RICHARD R. DALEY	PFC BILLIE E. LEWIS	Pvt. MELVIN R. PALMER

#### MEN OF THE 596<sup>th</sup> PARACHUTE ENGINEER COMPANY KILLED DURING THE LIBERATION OF PROVENCE

Sgt. WALLACE P. ENGLERT	PFC ERNEST R. COFFELT	Pvt. VESTAL A. LUCAS	Pvt. HAROLD H. MILLER
Sgt. HOWARD D. JAYNES, JR.	PFC HERBERT B. McLAMB	Pvt. LEONARD MATHIS	Pvt. HENRY WIKINS
PFC WILLIAM F. BOGGAN	PFC ALDIS J. SIEMIERSKI	Pvt. PATRICK L. MICHAELS	

THE 517<sup>th</sup> PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM WAS AWARDED THE FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE WITH SILVER-GILT STAR  
STREAMER EMBROIDERED DRAGUIGNAN

FRENCH DECISION NUMBER 247 15 JULY 1946

BY: THE PRESIDENT OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC





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

Monday, Sept 2

Greetings,

I am happy to report that all went well in France and that we returned home, safe and sound.

I think you've pulled some pictures from my facebook feed for Mail Call - and there might be a few more now. It's a lot to go through, but moments stand out:

- meeting up with the Frice and Rossi families for lots of time together, both in Draguinan and at Sospel and Col de Braus!

- a 517 Welcome Dinner at the home of **Alison Libersa**, the Rhone Cemetery Associate who has become a great friend.

- Re-enactment static line jumps by the Airborne Demonstration Team (**Steve and Leah Gomez** were there!) and Stephane Hadjadje's group, along with a French group, I think. Best static line jumps I've ever been able to see!

- Le Mitan on the morning of August 14, as they celebrate La Motte's being the first town liberated. This is where the field hospital was, and this event has been developed and coordinated by **Eric Renoux** and the leadership of the town of La Motte.

- Visiting the small town of Montauroux for the unveiling of the plaque for **Private Gruwell**, buried in their local cemetery in the immediate aftermath of the jump. The chief of police AND the tiny assistant mayor (she's now retired) remembered our visit from ten years ago, when we delivered the plaque of appreciation (drafted by **Howard Hensleigh!** and printed and framed by our own Bob Barrett on that memorable trip).

- Seeing the exhibition in Les Arcs, coordinated by **Jean Michel Soldi** and **Loic Jankowiac**.

- Getting Loic's book signed by the author! And then having Dad go through it to see which pages are important or meaningful - so many! I got the French version and will happily get the English version when published! The first of at least two books, it is amazingly researched and has tons of photos!

- The now-traditional end of La Motte-Le Muy-Les Arcs events: lunch with friends at Valbourges. **Eric Renoux** again coordinated tons of events in multiple communities, and lunch at Valbourges is the lovely lunch with friends that marks the end.

- Moving up to the Sospel area with **Morris McDowell** and the **Rossi** families, and exploring up there with **Roland and Patou Orengo!** Lunch at Col de Braus, and everyone else hiked Hill 1098. Full disclosure: I did not - I met them at the top.

- One of the Orenegos' neighbors, Catharina, hosted the 517 visitors at her home. So lovely.

- Lunch under the trees at the Orenegos' home. So many wonderful and heartfelt moments.

I cannot thank all of these people enough. They give up their time and went to tremendous effort to host us, in homes and in their towns.



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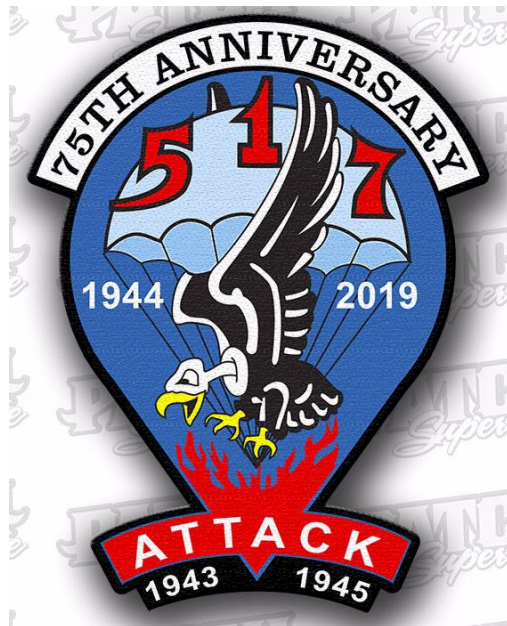
We did fund raise for, and distributed, 75th anniversary 517 patches. They were a huge hit and people were honored to received them as small gifts of thanks.

We'd like to fund raise for another order, to donate them to the staff at Seitz Elementary School on Fort Riley (about 100 or so), as well as donate them to the museum at Toccoa for them to sell. I will send a PDF of the patch.

If anyone is interested in donating to this fundraising effort, please contact me at 908 963 3528 (text is fine) or via email at [clairejgib@cocast.net](mailto:clairejgib@cocast.net).

Thanks so much

**Claire Giblin**





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### Other MailCall News

From WW@ Leagy Keepers - <https://www.facebook.com/TheirFinalChapter/>



#### Call To Arms:

WW2 Legacy Keepers proudly supports the [National Museum of the U.S. Army Campaign](#). After many years of raising funds, the museum will finally open its doors in just a matter of months. With the final faze of construction going on now, there has never been a more important time to contribute. If you analyze this campaign as if it were a battle, the museum would be considered to have the enemy outflanked and only in need of some reinforcements to overwhelm the enemy and secure the objective. You all can be those reinforcements.

For me I think there is a sense of urgency to open this museum while there are still some World War II veterans who will be able to visit it. Although the museum will honor every person who has worn the uniform of the U.S. Army, the Army heroes from the "Greatest Generation" have been waiting over seventy years to see their museum. Every other branch of the service already has a national museum. The time is now to help ensure this museum opens its doors on time, without any construction delays, so our World War II veterans will have time to see it. It is what we do right now that will make a difference for generations to come who will visit this museum in honor of all who have been called a United States Army soldier.

Please join WW2 Legacy Keepers in supporting this campaign. You can contribute through the WW2 Legacy Keepers fundraiser at

<https://armyhistory.causevox.com/ww2-legacy-keepers>

The fundraiser is being managed directly by the museum so you can trust that it is safe and secure. For more info about the National Museum of the U.S. Army you can visit their Facebook page [National Museum of the U.S. Army Campaign](#) or their website [armyhistory.org](http://armyhistory.org)



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

**From:** McClure, Marc E [<mailto:Marc.McClure@ws.edu>]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 19, 2019 8:05 PM  
**To:** Anderson Dwight  
**Subject:** seeking a particular veteran who attended last week

Hello Andy

I'm looking for this 517 PIB veteran for a possible interview on Martha MaCallum's Friday evening show on Fox. Do you know him and how I might reach him and his family?

Thanks,  
Marc

**Marc McClure, Ph.D.**  
**Professor of History**  
**Walters State Community College**  
**Morristown, TN 37813**



Hi Marc,

That gentleman is my good friend **K. Allan Johnson**, of the 596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company (part of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team).

I am copying his daughter, **Claire Giblin**, on this email.

Regards,

Bob Barrett

Hello Mrs. Giblin

I am director of a documentary film entitled *Sword of Freedom: the Unsung Heroes of the Liberation of France*, which will be released next May. I have just returned from two weeks of filming in France, during which I noticed your father's presence at a ceremony at La Mitan. I was not able to make his acquaintance owing to a scheduled interview with an FFI veteran immediately after the ceremony. I am reaching out to you for two particular reasons: a) I would like to arrange an interview with your father at some point, and b) more pressingly, I would like to know if he would be willing to participate in a filmed interview along with me on Fox News host Martha MacCallum's show, hopefully this Friday. My co-producer and I worked over the past month to interest Martha in Operation Dragoon and the 7th Army's campaign, and last Friday night she interviewed a paratrooper from the 551st (

[Marking the 75th anniversary of the 'forgotten invasion' of WWII](#)). We have been speaking with the show about a follow up interview with a veteran who attended the 75th anniversary and we would like to



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suggest your father for the interview. If your father is willing and the show agrees to it, they would find a Fox affiliate near his home and your father would be interviewed from that location. I would do the same through the affiliate in Knoxville, Tennessee. The interview is taped about 6pm on Friday and then airs at 9pm. Please let me know if your father is willing to participate and also where you live.

Here is a 7 minute video that lays out what we aim to do in the film: [Sword of Freedom, an introduction](#)

With best regards,

Marc McClure

Director, Sword of Freedom

[www.swordoffreedom.com](http://www.swordoffreedom.com)

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Good afternoon -

We arrived home early this morning and I do recall that Andy Anderson, the superintendent there, had wanted to connect us last week. I'm very pleased that there is interest in Operation Dragoon.

We were in Provence for about 9 days and though we were at the Rhone Cemetery two times, we did not attend the official ceremonies on the 16th. We were there the day before, though, and earlier in the week.

Dad does give interviews and has indicated a willingness to support the project. I will be honest that I've not been able to check out the links you've sent due to your time constraints this week; I want you to have a response as soon as possible today.

[...]

I can also direct you to the film *A Cut Above*, commissioned by the 517 a few years ago (10?), along with all the raw interview footage, available on vimeo. There's lots of footage of now-deceased troopers there. If you can't find it all, our 517 PRCT webmaster can help.

Please don't hesitate to contact me. Though generally I don't pick up for unknown callers and my mailbox is perpetually full, I will be mindful of the possibility of a call from you in the next few days. You can also text.

Thanks so much for reaching out. Alison, thank you as always!

Best regards,

**Claire Johnson Giblin**



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

Hi, Bob –

Please permit me to introduce Marc McClure, whom I nearly met in France but time is finite. You can see our exchange below and it's self-explanatory.

Can you assist Marc on two incidents? The first would be the death of **Henry Wikins** in the immediate aftermath of the jump. **Alison Libersa**, the Rhone Cemetery assistant, advised me that it had been a literal war crime.

The second would be the incident where the three engineers were killed in the same explosion, attempting to detonate a device.

The third incident, the Jeep accident with Dad and **Patrick Michaels**, is covered, I think, by the emails that Dad dictated over 10 years ago.

Note to Marc: We use the subject "FYEO and/or Not for Mail Call" to delineate for Bob what should go into our email digest and what shouldn't. I think that although this will be interesting, and you might want to reach out to the entire listserve, it's not ready quite yet.

Thank you both so much -

Claire Giblin

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Hi Claire,

I am still catching up on all the news and especially the photos from the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Dragoon. As you might assume, I'm including lots of your photos as well as a few from other attendees. I am trying to get the MailCall out today or tomorrow.

You did ask about the three incidents above, which I am still looking into. Regarding the first, **Henry Wilkins**, I have three versions of the story.

First is some background on Henry Wikins, as told by Ernie Kosan in Gerald Astor's 1993 *Battling Buzzards*:

Pages 92-93:

Kozan made one close friend, a youth with a background somewhat similar to his. "Henry Wilkins, whose original name was Wikinsky, had been a teenager living in Danzig, the free city, created through the Treaty of Versailles, on the Baltic Sea, between western Germany and East Prussia. The Poles call it Gdansk.

"During the 1930's Henry's parents realized the direction things were going and they planned Henry's emigration. They believed they were too old to leave but the future of their son depended on getting to the U.S.A. A family here took hm in and he became a citizen. We had long conversations aboard the ship taking us to Europe. He was



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comfortable speaking German and I was happy for the practice. The strange thing about Henry was that he harbored absolutely no hatred against the Germans. He taught me the Nazi party song – the ‘Horst Wessel Lied’. I think that he, as well as some other German Jews I had known, considered themselves as Germans first, which is a real tragedy.”

Page 194:

The 596<sup>th</sup> not only did not jump as a unit into Southern France but it also was well dispersed. One group fell at Le Muy, a town designated for future assault, and which lay four miles from the planned DZ. The jump brought serious injuries to two men, one of whom was Pvt. Henry Wikins, Ernie Kosan’s fellow refugee from Germany. Heavy mortar fire on the Americans forced them to pull back. Because of the severity of Wilkin’s injury, a broken leg, he could not be removed. A day later he was found dead, apparently executed by the Germans. The murderers cut off his penis and stuffed it in his mouth, perhaps because they knew he was Jewish since he wore a Star of David on a chain around his neck.

“This had a profound effect on our attitude towards the enemy for the rest of the war,” says Charlie Pugh.

Page 255:

Nevertheless, the losses continued. One of the worst blows struck members of the 596<sup>th</sup>. A crew from **Allan Goodman**’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon had been detailed to destroy concrete defense installations and remove German Teller mines at the Nice airport. According to Goodman, “The fuses from the Teller mines could not be safely removed. We used the mines as explosive for the demolition job, or blew them up in the ocean. We were living very well but apparently, handling thousands of mines lowered the respect of some for the danger. Six men went up in an explosion of several hundred mines on a truck. I heard later that two men were tossing mines to a catcher on the truck bed. I was several hundred yards away, working on the wall when the explosion occurred, yet I was splattered with debris. Some men just behind an adjacent concrete wall were deafened by the blast. **Lieutenant Zavattero** had to assemble us to see who was left. With the three others killed [clearing the pathway across the Var riverbed earlier] and another who died in the jump [Henry Wikins] and another who lost his life in a jeep accident near Sospel, the 596<sup>th</sup> has more fatalities than any company in the regiment, and eighty percent came from my platoon.”

The second source is **Michel De Trez**’ *First Airborne Task Force* (1998) which repeats the stories from **Charlie Pugh**:

“One of our men from Headquarters Platoon, **Pvt. Henry Wikins**, received injuries which would not permit him to move with his platoon to the assembly area. Because of the severity of his injury, and enemy mortar fire into the area, he could not be removed right away. So he was left behind as comfortable as possible. He was later found dead... he had



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a Star of David on a chain around his neck... His genitals were cut off and stuffed into his mouth....” (T/5 Charles Pugh, 596<sup>th</sup> PEC).

And last, but not least, is the info provided by **Jean-Loup Gassend** in his very thorough 2013 book *Operation Dragoon - Autopsy of a Battle*:

“It is important to note that at least 30 deaths were caused by glider incidents and 18 by parachute mishaps. IN other words, at least 48 out of 103, or almost half of the deadly casualties that occurred during the first four days of combat of the FABTF, were caused by landing mishaps, with gliders being particularly dangerous. Although some paratroopers were captured by the Germans during the fighting, it would seem that all these men were liberated again within hours or days. The number of men lost as prisoners is therefore very small, or perhaps even nonexistent. As a final word on the Allied casualties, veteran **Charles Pugh** reported in *First Airborne Task Force* by Michel De Trez, that the body of Pvt. Henry Wikins (who changed his name from Wikinski before entering the service), of the 596<sup>th</sup> PCEC, had been mutilated by German soldiers because he was Jewish. The Individual Deceased Personnel File of Henry Wikins does not confirm this information, only stating that he dies of a gunshot wound to the neck.

Bob Barrett

---

Good morning Bob

I certainly appreciate you taking all the time required to type up this information from your sources. The first time I heard this I was told that Wilkins had an H on his dog tag to indicate Hebrew, which I had not before heard of being included on dog tags. Your sources both indicate a Star of David. I appreciate you continuing to work on it. If I include Henry's horrible war crime death in the film, I will want to make sure the historical evidence substantiates it.

With best regards,

Marc







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We were interviewed by American History TV in May at Army Heritage Days in Carlisle, PA.

I'll send the link to the full video when it is posted but here's a short preview. It shows a little of what we do to teach the history of the 517th. (Error Note: I said "Colonel" Frederick instead of "General" when referring to the 1st Airborne Task Force commander.)

<https://www.facebook.com/179513292162226/posts/2334103843369816/>

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?463515-1/world-war-ii-combat-team-maritime-alps>

Matt Holmgren

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That's Matt Holmgren in the photo below. Watch this video from C-SPAN for a great summary of the 517<sup>th</sup> in Operation Dragoon, as told mostly by Matt H. It's a full 22 minutes long with the story of the 517<sup>th</sup> and the reenactments at the US Army Heritage center in Carlisle, PA. - BB

---

Here's the full video of our group posted on CSpan's website. Hope we can help keep the history alive.



**MAY 19, 2019**

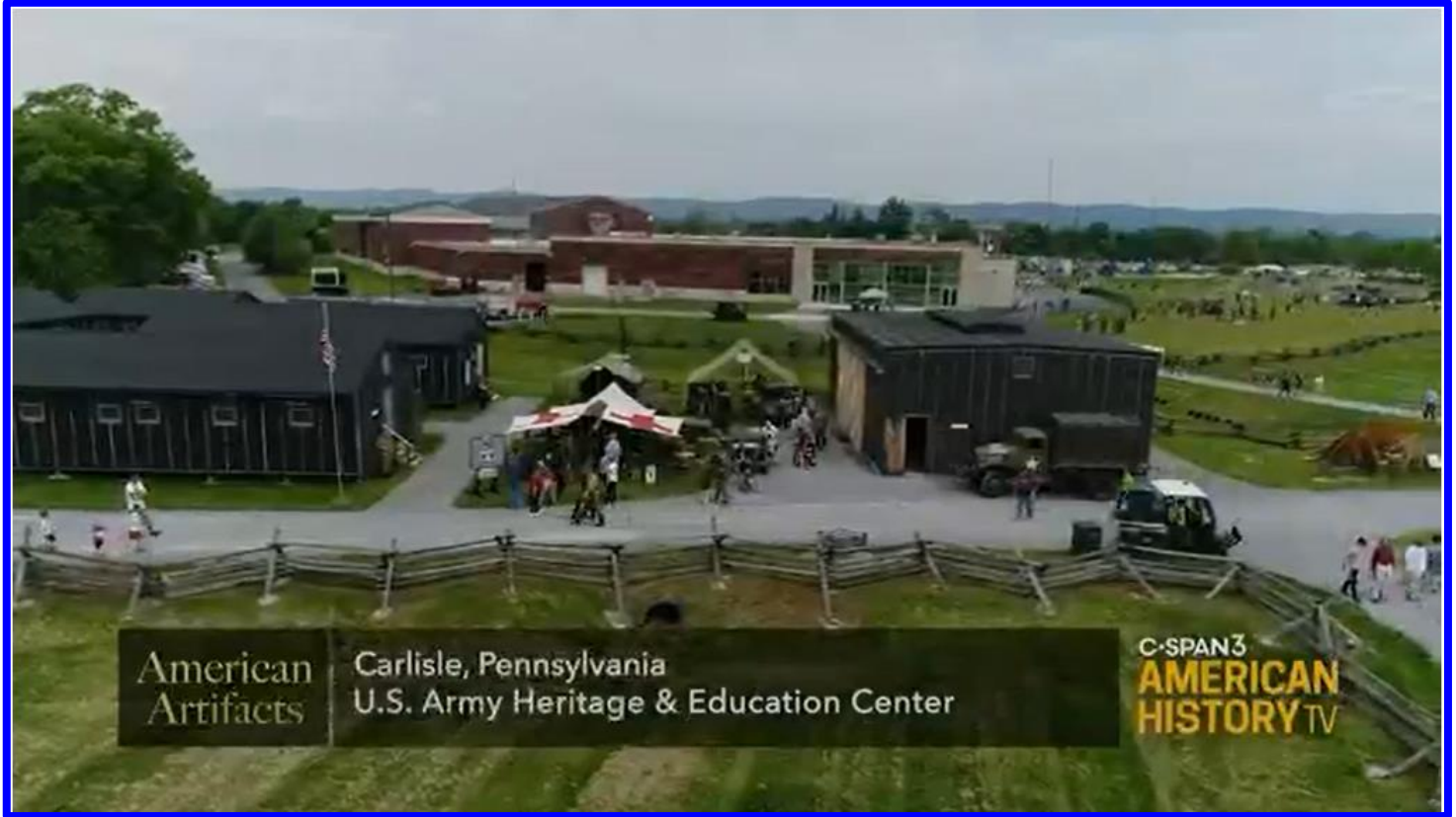
### **World War II Combat Team in Maritime Alps**

C-SPAN visited the living history camp of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team to learn about the experiences of U.S. Army soldiers in the Maritime Alps during World War II. The 517th jumped into southern France as part of the August 15, 1944 Operation Dragoon. This camp was part of the annual Army Heritage Days in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.



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See: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?463515-1/world-war-ii-combat-team-maritime-alps>



One of my father's friends:

**Claire Giblin**, daughter of **K. Allan Johnson**, 596<sup>th</sup> PCEC

### [American Battle Monuments Commission](#)

· August 30 ·

Help us remember Ernest R. Coffelt today.

World War II

Service # 34734290

Private First Class, U.S. Army

Unit: 596th Engineer Company, 517th Parachute Regiment

Entered Service From: Georgia

Date of Death: August 30, 1944

Buried: Plot C Row 10 Grave 3

Rhone American Cemetery

Draguignan, France

Awards: Silver Star, Purple Heart

— in [Rhone American Cemetery and Memorial](#).



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Monday Sept 2:

Greetings,

As I write, our southern friends are awaiting the arrival of Hurricane Dorian. **Helen Beddow** is evacuating shortly; I hope our Florida friends are safe!

I need to express my condolences on the passing of **Mel Dahlberg**. A wonderful fixture at even more recent reunions, Mel was an amazing trooper with, I thought, the most unusual career path of anyone I'd ever met. He worked as a stage dresser, meaning he dressed the stars (not the stage!). He described it as being part psychologist, I remember, and working with Dolly Parton was one of his most memorable jobs. He was a kind and interesting man, and so easy to chat with. He was great and welcoming, and my heart goes out to his family.

AATW -

**Claire Giblin**

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RE: Looking for contact info

Hi, My father was **Raymond (Ray) H. Nielsen** (Dec). He was very active attending 517th annual reunions, etc. until his health restricted him prior to his passing in 2000. I recently found some 517th memorabilia that I'd like to send to whomever might find it interesting or useful. Specifically, I have an envelope containing several items that appear to be from the unit's tour in 1989. Is there someone who I could mail this to who might be interested? Thanks for your help.

Dick Nielsen  
206-300-5161

---

From **Ben Arnold**:

**S-1 Officer Russ Johnson** of the 517th sitting on his jeep outside of the Grand Hotel Faraut in Peira Cava, France and the same spot today.





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

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

Also from **Ben Arnold**:



Headquarters Company headquarters in Joigny, France, spring 1945. The modern photo is a screenshot of a French movie filmed in and around the house. The producer's mother now owns it and knew that the Germans used the house. She was happy to learn that Americans used it also.



Joigny, France





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

A million thanks for sending me the newsletter and that I am back on your email listing. Just the other day, I met up with another veteran, from the Korean War, but his brother was in France. Now I have printed a copy of your newsletter and will keep it in my car so the next time I see one of those great guys or their relatives, I can let them know they are never forgotten. Many, many blessings to you, Bob, for carrying on the tradition. I thoroughly enjoyed the newsletter.

best wishes,

**anne justice**

After Operation Dragoon, we can start planning for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in the Battle of the Bulge:

**75<sup>ème</sup> Anniversaire de la Bataille des Ardennes**  
**13/14/15 DECEMBRE 2019**  
**MANHAY**  
(Belgique)

**Rassemblement de Véhicules Militaires WW2**  
**Reconstitutions & Bourse de militaria**

Entrée gratuite  
Free entrance

Avec la présence des  
*Manhattan Dolls*  
Arizona - USA

follow us on  
[www.ardennes-history-remember.be](http://www.ardennes-history-remember.be)  
Ardennes history remember 44/45

The Manhattan Dolls

Avec le soutien de  
Wallonie tourisme  
CGT

FTLB

Commune de Manhay

War Heritage Institute

MM

TOTAL

Entreprises  
Régionales  
de l'Ardenne  
Région de l'Ardenne  
0470/25 24 04

Dorche



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### *In Memorium*

From the 517<sup>th</sup> website Guestbook:

Submitted by	Comments:
Name: <b>SMSgt Howard C Aubrey</b> <b>USAF Ret</b> From: Burlington, Kentucky E-mail: <a href="mailto:hcaubrey@twc.com">hcaubrey@twc.com</a>	It is with great sadness that I announce the death of a member of the 517th PRCT. My father-in-law, <b>Jack J. Cason</b> passed away at the age of 95 on August 22, 2019. He remained ever so proud of his service with the 517th and often kidded me (since I am a retired Air Force NCO) about how the Army Air Corps missed the drop zone. We will miss his stories, but know that some day we'll meet again. Rest in peace, Jack.  Added: August 23, 2019

**Jack Cason** was with D Battery of the 460<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Artillery Battalion.

## Jack Junior Cason



Union - Jack Junior Cason, 95, passed away Thursday, August 22, 2019, at Emerald Trace Nursing Home in Erlanger KY. Jack worked as a Postal Carrier for 30 years and Turfway Race Track for 37 years. He was a WWII Army veteran, 517 Parachute Regimental Combat Team attached to the 82nd Airborne, who jumped in southern France and fought in The Battle of the Bulge. He was preceded in death by his wife Veta Cason. Survivors include his daughter Sherry Aubrey, daughter Laurie Billiter, son Mike Cason, step-daughter Donna Scholer-Jones, step-daughter Debbie Scholer, step-daughter Glenna Burtsch, step-son Dale Scholer, step-son Paul Scholer, and step-son Ted Scholer. Also surviving are 3 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren, and 5

great-great-grandchildren. Jack will be cremated, and services are being held at the convenience of the family. Memorials can be made Disabled American Veterans 3725 Alexandria Pike Cold Spring KY, 41076 or St Jude Children's Research Hospital 501 St Jude Place Memphis TN 38105. Online condolences can be made at [www.linnemannfuneralhomes.com](http://www.linnemannfuneralhomes.com)

Published in the Kentucky Enquirer on Aug. 25, 2019



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

I remember this note from **Steve Armbruster** in an old [MailCall, #2335](#) back in September 2016:

There were a group of D-460 troopers that did much the same as the Doolittle flyers did with the Bottle of Booze.

In addition to the bottle each 517 Reunion someone would add something, and one reunion long ago, **First Sgt. Mounts** brought the D-Btry guidon flag.

Well recently **Col. Schnebli's** daughter sent me a suitcase with the bottle and flag. The other two troopers, **Mike Schlacter** and **Jack Cason** are no longer interested or able to continue and i am looking for a final resting place for the Flag.

I am curious if there is a museum that may want it?

If you want to talk about this feel free to call

### Steve Armbruster

This bottle will only be opened by one of the last three surviving members of the 460<sup>th</sup> Parachute Field Artillery, "D" (Dog Battery). In their meeting, they will toast and drink to the memory of their dedicated comrades, the paratroopers of the 460<sup>th</sup>. During World War 2, these soldiers (from all four corners of the United States of America and Canada) gave unselfishly of themselves in defense of the great country that they loved, the United States of America.



As I have mentioned several times before, I don't have complete records of the 517<sup>th</sup> troopers, but I have tried my best to maintain the old Thunderbolt roster from 2008. I have added a few troopers who have popped up, and tried to keep track of those who have died if I hear about it. But many from the 2008 roster have never been heard from in years, and even the entire roster includes only about 1100 people (including some family and friends, not troopers) of the original 2500-ish members of the 517<sup>th</sup>.

The last time I checked, in September 2016 after Stephen **Armbruster's** email above, there were still 3 or 4 460-D troopers who might be alive. But after hearing about **Jack Cason's** recent death, I searched for some other names. I found another obituary for **Michael Schlachter**, below.

So, unfortunately, Stephen Armbruster may now be the last known remaining member of 460-D. Has anyone heard from him? His last known address was Hendersonville, NC. -- Bob B.



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### **Michael Henry Schlachter**



Of Chesaning, MI

Passed away peacefully Thursday afternoon, **May 18, 2017**, at his home at 92 years old. Final prayers will take place at the Misiuk Funeral Home of Chesaning at 10:15 a.m. Tuesday, May 23, 2017. **THERE WILL BE NO VISITATION AT THE CHURCH.** A Mass of Christian Burial will follow at 11:00 a.m. at St. Peter Parish Catholic Church, 404 S. Wood Street, Chesaning. Fr. William Gruden will officiate. Burial will follow at Mt. Calvary Catholic Cemetery with full military honors. Visitation will be from 2:00-9:00 p.m. Monday at the Misiuk Funeral Home. The Knights of Columbus will pray the Rosary at 8:00 p.m. Monday at the funeral home and followed by a Firemen's Tribute at 8:30 p.m.

Mike was born November 23, 1924, the son of August and Katherine (Martin) Schlachter. Mike was a lifelong resident of Chesaning. During WWII he served in the US Army in the 517th Parachute Combat Team. In 1947, he married Barbara Gewirtz. She preceded him in death on May 20, 1978. Mike, along with Bill and Art Gewirtz, purchased Gewirtz Hardware and Appliance from Fred Gewirtz. Mike retired from the business in 1984.

Mike was a long time councilman and former Mayor of Chesaning. He served on the Chesaning Fire Department for 49 years. He started as a Rescue Captain, and later advanced to Assistant Fire Chief, and then Fire Chief, and then back to fireman before retiring in 1994.

Mike was a long time Chesaning school bus driver. He was a volunteer for the Chesaning Showboat as the Boat Captain and served as Chairman in 1961. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and American Legion. He loved his summers at his cottage on Higgins Lake entertaining Post 212 with his boom bass. A big joy in his life was taking his kids to Frankenmuth for dinner and getting a family picture taken.

Mike is survived by his son, Tom (Sandy) Schlachter; five daughters, Mary Beth (John) Reiber, Sue (Wayne) Vogelaar, Jane (Charles) Sivak, JoEllen (Vern) Hollerback, and Michelle (Dan) Shooltz; 16 grandchildren; 21 great-grandchildren; two special nephews, Dale and Denny Muirhead; longtime friends, Don Swartzmiller and Ken Valentine; and other loving family and friends. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Barbara; infant twin brother and sister, Oelander and Auralia; his brothers, Arthur, Virgil, Martin, and August Schlachter; sisters, Mary Smith, Armella Gross, and Catherine Alderson; and a foster brother, Eugene Martin.

Charitable donations given in memory of Mike can be made to the American Cancer Society, American Diabetes Association, or Compassus Hospice of Bay City.





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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](mailto: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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Send MailCall news to	<a href="mailto:MailCall@517prct.org">MailCall@517prct.org</a>
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2018 Roster (updated!)	<a href="http://www.517prct.org/roster.pdf">www.517prct.org/roster.pdf</a>
Thunderbolt Archives	<a href="http://www.517prct.org/archives">www.517prct.org/archives</a>

Another round of What's Older? Poppop or....?

