



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2429

December 8, 2019

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

MailCall News



December 8th, 1941, US Officially Enters WWII.

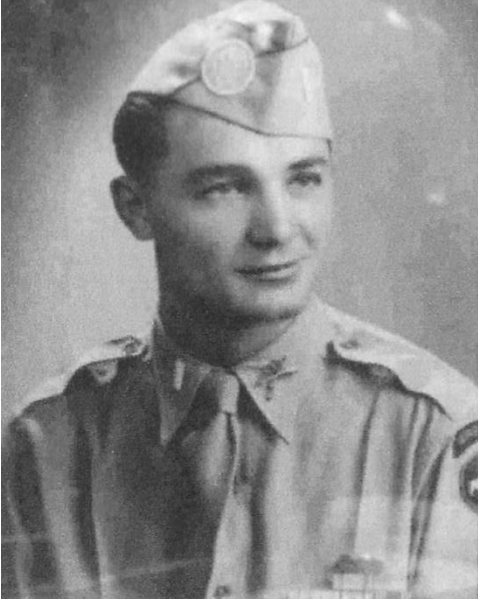
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**US OFFICIALLY
ENTERS WWII**

DECEMBER 8TH, 1941



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John 'Boom Boom' Alicki of the 517th PIR was among the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Brigade in Pearl Harbor.

From his autobiography, *A Veteran's Remembrance*

http://517prct.org/bios/john_alicki_files/alicki_book/alicki.pdf

Upon arriving in Hawaii, I was assigned duty with the U.S. Army Hawaiian Department, Fort Shafer, Territory of Hawaii (TH) under the Command of Lt. General Walter C. Short with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery 64th Coast Artillery (AA) Regiment. Later in mid-1941, I transferred as Sergeant to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 53rd Coast Artillery Brigade (AA) Regiment in Communication when we were hit by the Japanese surprise attack on December 7, 1941. Other than the infamous attack by the Japanese, I will always remember the day I stood for four hot grueling hours at rigid attention as Guard of Honor in front of Headquarters Hawaiian Department when the Japanese Ambassador, Admiral Kishiburo Numura, stopped by prior to the infamous attack to confer with Lt. General Walter C. Short and Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet.

Lenoir News Topic of Lenoir, NC

2002

Remember Pearl Harbor

A sneak attack changed his life, Today John Alicki lives in a round house surrounded by oriental gardens, a quiet stream, and seclusion. He can hear you coming.

Sixty-three years ago at Pearl Harbor he heard the warplanes coming from so far away. John Alicki, depending how you might view his experience, was either in the right place at the right time or the worst time in history.

Either way, John holds no regrets that he was just about to enter a church overlooking Pearl Harbor when more than 350 Japanese bombers began their surprise attack from the



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air on December 7, 1941. He Was packed and ready to board a ship to go home to the United States the next day.

John has already spent more than six years in the armed forces and he was ready to get out. But 10 months later in October 1942, John was still at Pearl Harbor and for the next fifteen years he continued active service to his country.

Later in World War II, John also fought against Nazi Germany as a paratrooper with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. He also fought in the Korean conflict in the early 1950s. During his military career, he collected some 18 medals and citations including the Purple Heart and Bronze Star medal.

The fact he was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, is recorded on his official 1957 honorable discharge from the U.S. Army as a Major.

"This sneak attack changed my entire life," he said in a recent interview at this two-story house on the base of Hibriten Mountain.

"After that, nobody could tell me what was going to happen to me...except that I was in for the duration."

On December 7, John was a U.S. Army sergeant in the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Brigade. On the day of the infamous attack, which brought American military forces into World War II, John had made special arrangements to attend church service with some of his men in the outfit, and some Hawaiian native friends.

"It just so happened that on that Sunday morning they got me up a little early and held me to my promise to go to church. While we were entering the church just before eight a.m., we heard something in the distance like firecrackers. As went into the church the sound became more audible. Then we saw planes overhead. They had to pass over us to get to their bombs to the ships. It so happened we had a Colonel in the church and he said "Wait a minute". He got up and went out, came back and said, "We are under a Japanese attack. You men in the church get back to your stations". The explosions started shaking the church. When I stepped out of the church I could see the red disk emblem on the side of the planes. From where the church was, you could see the whole harbor. To me, it seems like it was only yesterday.



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On December 7, 1941, I was just a kid, 23-years old and still wet behind his ears and learning about life, and here I am today. I'm thankful to the Almighty to be here."

The Japanese attack lasted for two hours and came in two waves of aircraft about an hour apart, pounding United ships and installations at Pearl Harbor. The best of American's fleet was at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. When it was over, 21 ships were sunk or destroyed, 2,403 military personnel were dead and another 1,178 wounded. The entire event is widely accepted as American's single worst military defeat in peacetime.

Of the dead, some 1,177 went down with the USS Arizona in Pearl Harbor on that Sunday morning according to official statistics with the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association (PHSA). The PHSA motto is "Remember Pearl Harbor — Keep America Alert." The PHSA has a current membership of 12,197 Americans who were present on that day in 1941.

Now that 64 years have gone by, John holds no resentment toward the Japanese people.

"As you can see I am influenced by the oriental people. The Japanese have as much feeling as we have. A lot of them have the same regrets we have. I feel that we need to let the Japanese know that we are truly and sincerely their friends and this silent animosity has to be completely done away with. Then we can get along and live in peace. We have to let them know the past is the past and let's not forget it."

Guestbook entry:

Submitted by	Comments:
Name: Ed Meyers From: Penfield NY E-mail: emeyers4@rochester.rr.com	Looking to find any information on my cousin Pvt Lincoln Ackerman 517 th 1st Battalion, Headquarters Company. He was killed at Battle of Bulge and buried in a Belgium cemetery. I'll be 90 years old this coming March and we are in the process of putting the family history album together before we run out of time. Thank you very much Ed Added: December 6, 2019



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Hello Bob,

Season's Greetings to you, your family, and all of our 51th family wherever they may be this time of year.

I was going to do some research regarding a trooper whose history is traveling with an exhibit in the State of Washington on WWII vets. Its Trooper **Bob Hart** from D Co. I was going to find out more on the site here and found that his link in the "Meet the Troopers" section appears to be broken (as well as Grandpa's). You continue to do such great work on the site and its maintenance. I wanted to let you know about it because I would love to know more about Bob.

Merry Christmas to all,

Scott Ross

Grandson of **Norman L Ross Jr.**

I Co. 3rd Btn.

Hi Scott,

I just fixed those 2 links. I may still have to look for others that might be broken. I am probably responsible for the broken links myself. A year or two ago, I had to get a new laptop, and the old programs I've been using since we started the website 20 years ago are no longer functional. So I switched to a simple free, web editor. But it's not a simple as the old one, and my fingers still slip occasionally.

Thanks for letting me know.

Bob Barrett

Bob: a very interesting and most informative Mail Call today.

I did not know any of the information about the volume of first class mail to the troops, the v-mail or the mailing of packages. Was your research triggered by the inquiry from the remarkable 98 year old veteran who is publishing his war time letters to his wife. Thank you very much.

The backstory article on James Stewart and his award winning "It's a Wonderful Life" movie was so poignant. The next time I watch this classic will be even more meaningful.

And the information on **Dick Spencer's** editorial life after the war was amazing. Like I said at the beginning of this email, this was another very rich Mail Call. You are amazing. On behalf of all of us thank you.

Pat Seitz



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Good Morning,

I am Lauren Wheeler and I have come across your newsletter about the 517th parachute Regimental Combat Team. And I have been researching for the history of my husband's grandfather for him and his father. Since the family has a few different stories and so far we have only found out (not 100%) but he was in the "82nd airborne" with the "517th Parachute Regimental" . His name was Charles Edward Wheeler.

If you or anyone has any information or other photos we would so very much appreciate it. Or if you know of where I may be able to find out his service history. Seems there was a fire with some records and he was part of that.

So we are unsure his title or awards or his honors or his discharge ending role.

If you could let me know this would make an amazing Christmas present for my husband and his father.

I have also attached a photo that we do have from his service time.

Thank you again

Lauren Wheeler



Him and his brother in Hawaii.



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Hi Lauren,

I took a quick look through my records of the 517th, which are very incomplete. Unfortunately, I don't have any specific references to Charles Wheeler. Do you have any other clues? How do you know he was with the 517th?

The only "official" records I have found is the enlistment records form NARA at:

https://aad.archives.gov/aad/display-partial-records.jsp?s=3360&dt=893&tf=F&bc=sl&q=&btnSearch=Search&as_alq=wheeler+charles+e&as_anq=&as_epq=&as_wog=

There are several Charles Wheeler's listed. It doesn't give any info about their service other than when and where they enlisted.

Don't give up completely on those records in the St. Louis fire. I do hear that they are slowly recovering additional records.

Here is what little that I can tell you: From the picture, he had a rank of Tech 5. Initially, I figured that the AA patch is from the "All American" 82nd Airborne, but I don't recognize that version of the patch. I do see some similar AA patches, and that one looks more like it might be from the WW2 US Army Anti-Aircraft Command. (Which BTW, had an installation in Hawaii.)



See: <https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/insignia-anti-aircraft-command-united-states-army>

and

<https://jpsc.ndu.edu/Portals/72/Documents/Faculty/Learning%20to%20Fight%20from%20the%20Ground%20Up--American%20AAA%20in%20World%20War%20II.pdf?ver=2019-02-14-133956-187>

Sorry that I can't help more. If you have other records or photos of training or Europe, it could give me more clues.

Bob Barrett



From: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/12/141214-battle-of-the-bulge-hitler-churchill-history-culture-ngbooktalk/?fbclid=IwAR2aPjzGurMHaRjv6SqrtgnBTExAhdEcbm4A5KwhEL-bsuwd7f_SYamZo

BOOK TALK

The Real Reason Hitler Launched the Battle of the Bulge

Among a new book's revelations: Crystal meth was the German army's drug of choice.

8 MINUTE READ

BY SIMON WORRALL, FOR [NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC](#)

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 15, 2014

Winston Churchill called World War II's Battle of the Bulge "the greatest American battle of the war." Steven Spielberg engraved the 6-week ordeal on the popular imagination with *Band of Brothers*, which dramatized the attack on the village of Foy by three companies of the 101st Airborne Division, the Screaming Eagles.

Now, British military historian Peter Caddick-Adams is drawing on his years spent reconstructing the epic battle in his just-published book, *Snow and Steel: Battle of the Bulge 1944-45*. Speaking from a British military base in Germany, he talks about Hitler's reasons for launching the offensive, why crystal meth was the drug of choice for the Wehrmacht, and what lessons the battle can teach us today.

How did the battle get its name? What was the Bulge?

To begin with, soldiers weren't sure what to call the battle. It was a German penetration into the American lines, which the Americans had then surrounded and eventually sealed off. The word for that in the First World War was "salient." But that sounded too formal, perhaps too British. An American journalist was interviewing George Patton. The journalist needed a unique, American-sounding word that could become shorthand for the battle. And the word "bulge" popped into his mind. It was adopted pretty soon after the battle, and it stuck.

Your interest in the battle began with a schoolboy epiphany. Take us back in time.

I had some friends who restored secondhand military vehicles. One summer in the mid-1970s they invited me to return to the area where the Battle of the Bulge had been fought. We drove in these vehicles, and to make it look right, we put on some khaki, then drove through the little villages of the [Ardennes](#).

I was amazed by the older generation, who came out of their houses and could remember what was by then 30 or so years earlier. You could see by their faces how much it had meant to them. Some of them burst into tears the moment they saw a U.S. jeep.



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One farmer led us up a small trail to the top of a hill and showed us where the American and German lines had been. I couldn't see anything, which was somewhat of a disappointment. Then I kicked idly at a stone. It turned out not to be a stone but an entrenching tool. All of a sudden beneath the undergrowth, when I looked, there were cartridges, bits of helmet, canteens—all the debris you'd associate with a battle. When you're a teenager, that makes a huge impression.

You say Hitler's decision to launch the Ardennes offensive was more political than military. How so?

I feel I was breaking new ground by asserting that the decision by Hitler to launch the Ardennes attack—and it's his alone—is a political one rather than a military one. The traditional view is that this is an attempt to turn around the military situation as it was at the end of 1944. ([See a World War II time line.](#))

I came to the conclusion that this is rather Hitler's attempt to reassert his personal political control over the German general staff and the entire Nazi hierarchy. It's a reaction to the [von Stauffenberg bomb attempt](#) on his life on the 20th of July, 1944. After that, he hides away. He goes into shock. He doesn't know whom to trust. His health goes downhill. The genesis of Hitler's plans to launch the Bulge is his grappling to retain control of the direction of military affairs and prove to the Third Reich that he's still the man at the top.

A fascinating section in your book explains the mythological and cultural significance of forests to the German psyche. How did the Ardennes campaign fit into this?

Again, I think I was breaking new ground here. I wondered why Hitler had specifically chosen the Ardennes. It's his plan, and everything about it had to have significance. Therefore, I wondered if there was more to the Ardennes than simply a region where the Allies were weak. I went back to Hitler's pronouncements, his beliefs, and his fascination with Wagner. In [Wagner](#), a huge amount of the action takes place in woods and forests. This taps into the old Nordic beliefs and gods—that woods are a place of testing for human beings.

If you look at the whole Nazi creed, the false religion that Hitler and the SS created, woods and forests crop up time after time. Even the code name for the offensive, *Herbstnebel*—Autumn Mist—has all sorts of Wagnerian connotations. Wagner uses mist or smoke to announce the arrival of evil. So it was no accident that the attack against the Americans was launched from large forests, in heavy fog.

Hitler had a very low opinion of the Americans as a fighting force. Why?

Hitler thought the Americans were a mongrel force made up of all sorts of different nations. But that's a blatant misreading of history. For a start, Germany itself is a mixture of all sorts of different nations. Huge numbers of Americans who went to fight in the Ardennes in 1944 had also come originally from Germany. He also overlooks that so many great American figures were originally German. Eisenhower originally came from the Saarland. Pershing, the American general in World War I, is a German name.

All Hitler's knowledge of the United States is from reading cowboy books written by a charlatan writer called [Karl May](#), who'd never actually been to the United States. So Hitler is remarkably ill-equipped to make these sweeping generalizations about the Americans—particularly about their ability to mass manufacture, which is one of the things that bring about his downfall. The Germans are going into battle barely better equipped than they were in 1914, with upwards of 50,000 horses. By contrast, the Americans are fully mechanized.



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A figure who strides out of the pages of the book is the cigar-chomping American general, [Patton](#). In what ways did he typify the American character—and fighting tactics?

It's difficult to discuss the Bulge without referring to George Patton, with his cigars and trademark pearl-handled revolvers. He is so American, from a British point of view. What do I mean by that?

Well, he had unbounded confidence. And, I think, one thing that marks out successful captains in history is a superb confidence that almost borders on arrogance. That's something Patton has. He would always say that a perfect plan is not as good as an imperfect plan that's executed violently and immediately.

One of the key aspects of the battle is the speed with which he can reorientate his Third Army, which is to the south of the Bulge, and get them to counterattack the Germans by moving north. To turn a whole army around on its axis by 90 degrees and move north in the middle of winter at almost no notice is almost unheard of.

But Patton achieves this within a couple of days—much to the amazement of the Germans and even more to the amazement of his fellow Allies. He says he will do it. Most people don't believe he can. Yet, my goodness me, he delivers, and delivers in spades.

On the other side, one of the most compelling characters is the German Panzer commander, [Joachim Peiper](#). He was nasty bit of work, wasn't he?

Joachim Peiper was a 28-year-old true believer in the Nazi faith. His whole life had been acted out in the shadow of Hitler and the Third Reich. He'd come to prominence early. He was a colonel in the Waffen SS and worked as an adjutant to Himmler. He was involved in a whole series of war crimes on the eastern front, where he taught his men to regard Russian lives as being worth nothing.

He and his men bring this mentality to the western front when they fight in the Bulge in 1944, and it's they who perpetrate the famous massacre just outside the town of [Malmedy](#).

I also wanted to try and strip the gloss off Joachim Peiper as a brilliant military commander. One of the points I make in the book is that he had passed his best in a military sense. His performance wasn't nearly as good as he claimed it to be. When I went back through the records, I found he'd lied about the progress he'd made during the Battle of the Bulge.

One of the things that most surprised me was your contention that the use of [crystal meth](#) was widespread in the German army.

The Germans routinely encouraged their soldiers to take what we would now call crystal meth before battle. It would whip them up into a fury and may explain some of the excesses they committed. It's a way of motivating scared young men. And some of the Germans are very young indeed. I found lots of evidence of 16-year-olds being put into uniform and sent into battle.

So I think you're reaching for every possible technique to exaggerate your soldiers' combat performance. This wasn't just an SS thing. The German army was not below stooping to use drugs to increase its soldiers' effectiveness on the battlefield.

What are the most important lessons, militarily and personally, you took away from studying the battle?



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Writing military history is fascinating because you never end up where you think you will. One of the things I took away was how much the Allies deluded themselves as to the situation of their opponents—how much they believed, because they wanted to believe, that the Germans were a spent force. The Battle of the Bulge proved exactly the opposite. And we do this time and time again. We under-appreciate the effectiveness of our opponents even today.

Personally speaking, I was fascinated and humbled by the resilience of the soldiers, particularly the Americans, I met, whether personally or through their letters and diaries. I have seen action in combat zones myself. But I could have no conception of the horrific, freezing conditions that the American soldiers coped with and overcame.

What I took away is that soldiering is not about planning. It's all about how you react when something goes wrong, when the wheel comes off—how quickly you can turn things around, how resilient and deep your resolve is. That was demonstrated in spades by the U.S. Army at the Bulge. And that is deeply humbling and very instructive.

How many Bulge veterans are alive today?

There are precious few. Of the several hundred thousand that took part in the Battle of the Bulge, only a [couple of thousand](#) are now left with us. Most of those are fading fast, which is one of the reasons I wanted to write the book for the 70th anniversary. I knew that if I left it any longer, there'd be no one left around to say, "Yes, that's how it was," or "No, the author's talking a load of rubbish." [Laughs] I wanted to write it as a tribute to those who'd fought in the campaign, while there were still some of them left alive to appreciate my comments.

Simon Worrall curates [Book Talk](#). Follow him on [Twitter](#) or at [simonworrallauthor.com](#).

Video: [Remember Christmas 1944](#)

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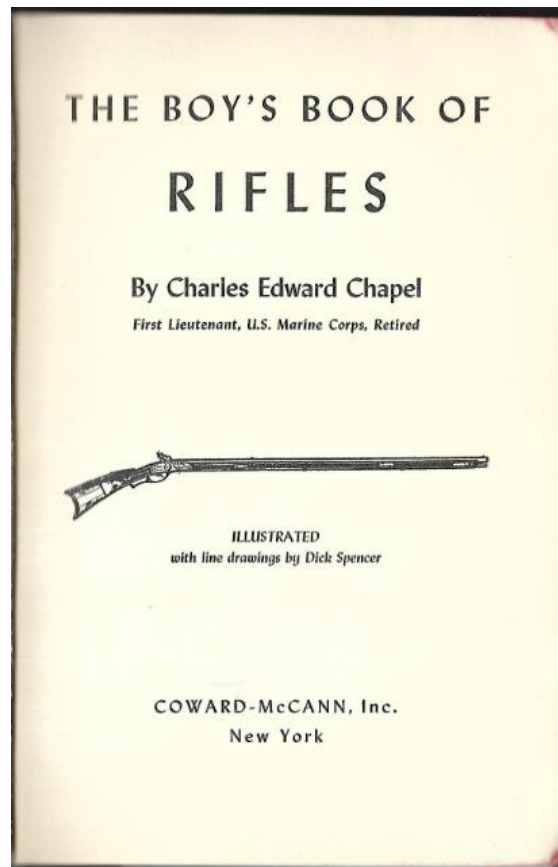
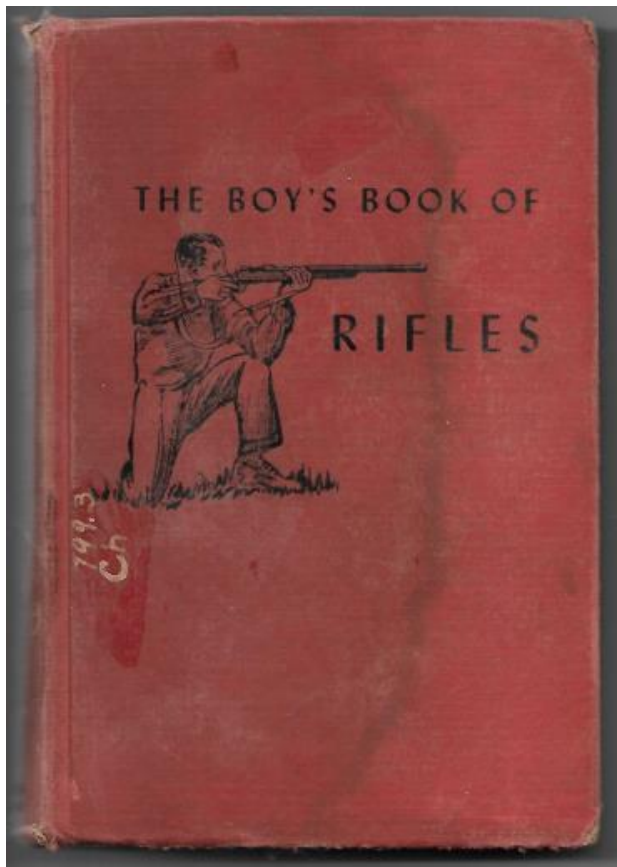
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The Boy's Book of Rifles – 1948

Illustrated with line drawings by **Dick Spencer**