



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



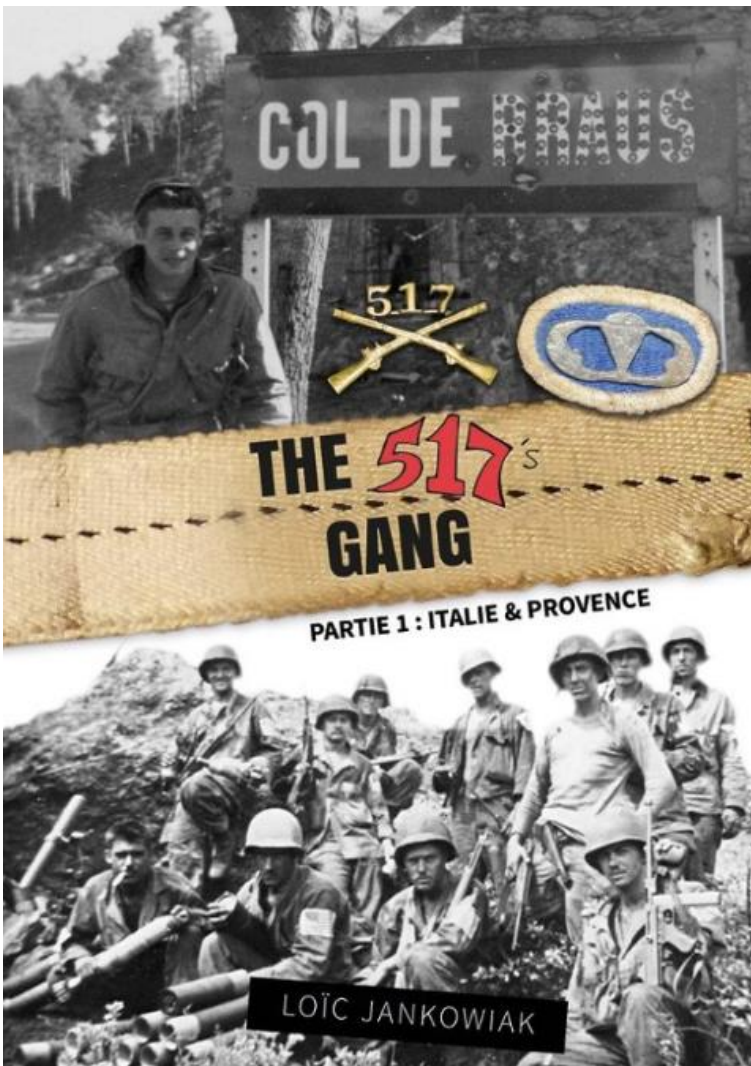
PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2433

January 26, 2020

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

MailCall News



Dear American, English and english-speaking friends,

You have been many since the month of May 2019 since the release of the French version, asking when the English version would be available, I have the answer now.

After long months to translate the texts and captions of the book, the English version of 'The 517's Gang' Part I is now finished. The book will be available in the third week of February 2020. You can do a pre-order right now to be sure to get a copy. Many books can be shipped in one time so don't hesitate to combine shipping.

There is an English translation on the website to order your book(s) so you don't get it wrong. Remember to fill in your address correctly in the online form. There is no registration required.

Thank you very much to have wait until now.

Loïc Jankowiak, author of *The 517's Gang*.

Order yours here: <https://1stabtf.com/en/boutique/the-517ths-gang-us-eng-version/> [Corrected link]



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Dear Bob:

This is an excellent Mail Call. Thank you. It is especially meaningful to me and my brother, sisters, our spouses, niece and cousins since its focus, with maps, is the 2/517 battle at Trois Ponte and Monte Fosse.

For our father, **Dick Seitz**, this battle, particularly the men he lost, seared his soul every day for the rest of his 95 1/2 years. When I read the stats in Tom Cross' memo it brings the tremendous impact home to me and reminds me of the privilege Alan and I had of walking this battle field with Dad. That day, after Dad walked Monte Fosse by himself, he returned to us; he said nothing, but his facial expression was greatly troubled. Several years later I was present when he recounted the battle in response to a question from a combat tested officer, at Southern Command, who asked "what was his worst day in combat." He ended his recounting saying that everyday since then he asked himself what could he have done differently to save his 21 men he lost.

Thank you also for the picture of **Tom Cross** and the reminder of his birthday. Amazing that he is celebrating his 101st birthday. Tom was so very close to Dad, as reflected in the fact that he was Dad's best man when Dad married Mama.

Dad would also have been 101 on his birthday February 18. My brother Rick and cousins will be celebrating his birthday with the kids at the elementary school named for him at Fort Riley.

Pat Seitz



(l-r) Dave Armstrong, Dick Seitz, Tom Cross.





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I am baffled by my email accounts. Somehow some of my communications are being routed to an account I do not use much. I am not sure if you have received a story and photo that I sent to you the other day. I just check that account and that's where it showed my email had been sent from. I am trying to change this pattern and am sending that story through this account. If you would, please direct the Mail Call newsletter to this account.

I apologize for the delay in getting that story to you. Your reply was sent to the other account. I have more photos I could send but because I take photos at a high resolution I can usually only get two attached. Do you know a way for me to compress those?

Regards,

Jeff Rossi

Hi Jeff,

I did get this email. I did not get anything else recently. I will change your MailCall settings.

There are ways to shrink files and to send large ones, but it will take a little explanation. I'll get back to you soon. Great to hear from you.

Bob Barrett

A Trip into History, August 11 -- 24, 2019

Jeff Rossi

My brother **Jesse** and our wives **Terri and Diane** made planes in 2016 to make the trip to southern France to participate in and honor the 75th anniversary of the 517 combat jump and their 90-plus days of battle. Our dad **George Ross** was a member of F Company. Our adventure began on August 11, 2019, when we arrived at Hotel Col de L'Ange in Draguignan. We were greeted by fellow travelers **Wayne, grandson Fisher and Karen Frice Wallace; Claire and Jim Giblin with her dad, a 596 vet, Kaare Allan Johnson**. Becoming part of this group proved to be a most fortunate circumstance. Their past trips here had connected them solidly with key individuals. We were welcomed in and included in so many events we surely would have missed. Each day there was something else to attend. A reenactment jump of 50 onto one of the original drop zone near Le Muy in the morning. The four of us took an afternoon trip to Sainte Roseline Chateau and were allowed into the courtyard that served as the first CP.

Somehow dad had acquired a Michelin road map and he marked the route they marched and dates. Our intent was to drive as much of that route as possible and after the stop at Sainte Roseline we started out. Fayence was as far as we got but driving gave us an appreciation for the terrain, and this wasn't even the serious geography.

August 14 began with a formal celebration in Le Mitan where the first field hospital and General Frederick's HQ had been established. This was also the general vicinity where F Company dropped. Many dignitaries, re-enactors and participants for this very formal proceedings were in attendance. The most



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significant, however, was the presence of three veterans: Two Brits: **S/Sgt. Alex Sutton** and **Jim Chitendon**, and 596 vet **Keare Allan Johnson**. Then it was off to Chateau Valbourges. Many of us as passengers in WWII jeeps and trucks. A very touching and emotional service was held. This had been the drop zone for many 551 troopers. A wreath laying at the monument and a presentation of the battalion flag to a group of re-enactors. During this the “*Star Spangled Banner*” was sung and nearly all of the French re-enactors joined in and sang it complete. There were many wet eyes. Following this there was a late afternoon parade of the WWII vehicles and a village celebration in La Motte.

It was at the Rhone’ American Cemetery on the 15th spending hours in the morning placing a French and a US flag in front of each grave in preparation for the event the next day. The afternoon had two wreath laying ceremonies in Les Arcs. The first at the train station where a major engagement occurred, and the next at the site of the execution of a French Resistance and editor by the Gestapo.

August 16 is all about Valbourges and a remembrance ceremony. Once again, the re-enactors are all a big part of this. Many military uniforms, Resistance, nurses, and the trucks and jeeps. A large wooden door in the courtyard near the chapel has photos of many vets tacked on. **Eric Renoux** gives a stirring address in French and English. Wreathes are lain. A mass is said in the chapel. A hearty country lunch was then served to everyone. This brought to a close our time in the area where the liberation began on August 14, 1944.

It is difficult to give a description to what those days were in the Les Arcs region. So much history. So much gratitude. So much welcoming in. So many new friends, and so many memories. The experience was so heart touching. Now it was time to leave for Sospel. The endgame for the 517. An entirely different conflict than what they had encountered in the initial days.

Once we have driven to Nice it is a turn to the north. Our destination is to meet at a cafe in Col de Braus for lunch. The “road” to the top of Hill 1098 lies a hundred yards from our lunch table. Here we are met by **Roland Orengo** and his friend. A very good lunch. Nothing like what was served up in the chow line in ‘44.

Many mementos are posted on the walls of this cafe. There is one near the door that is special. A pencil sketch by **Gene Frice** and signatures. Now it was time to make our way to the top of 1098. Some hopped into Roland’s pickup and six of us hiked the mile incline picking up old shrapnel along the way. Yes, 1944 metal is easily found. The walk for me was solemn. I gave thought to my 19 year old father on this same road seventy-five years ago. 1098 is where F Company spent a week of back-and-forth with the Germans.

Our small group spent quite some time at the top. We had a photo of George Ross atop 1098. Brother Jesse and I tried to recreate the pose on the same spot. We left some Camel cigarettes and a few black and white photos behind. We left them near where ashes of **Gene Frice** and his wife and **Gary Davis** had been left on past trips to the top of 1098. We took a gulp of J&B Scotch and loaded into Roland’s pickup for the long windy, curvy, steep road down into Sospel.



Allan Johnson (596th) at Les Arcs



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Roland brought us up to Mount Agaisen across the valley from 1098. It is one of the three huge underground fortresses of the Maginot Line. From here the German artillery bombarded 1098. There were no re-enactors or celebrations here. They would come in the next few months. We would miss those. At this point our traveling party split up. Most heading back to the States. Us onto Belgium.

It was 1330 when we arrived at our inn in Trois Ponts. Then a brief drive to Stavelot for a few hours. On our return to the inn we found that **Arnold Tarnion** had been waiting to greet us. He and his wife **Irma** invited us into their home for a light meal and a discussion for a tour of the area in which the 517 had been engaged in 1944/45.

The following morning, we met and began the day's journey. Much was seen and discussed including Manhay, Stavelot, Wanne, Trois Ponts, and Malmedy. A highlight was a visit to the farm where Irma was born in 1941. We were ushered down into the cellar where she described how as a child she would look up through the small window to see the legs and boots of Germans standing outside. Also during our tour we visited the 517 monuments at Manhay, Wanne and St Jacques Church. My image of the countryside had been of pastureland and some woods. In reality the area borders on mountainous with forests. Then to realize waist-deep snow 75 years ago and below freezing temps to make this real estate quite formidable.

The next day we meet a young man, Gregoire, sent to us by Irma and Arnold because of his knowledge and dedication to the 517. We began around Trois Ponts and Fosse, and ultimately arrive at the Remember Museum 39-45 in Clermont. **Mathilde and Marcel Schmetz** opened the doors to allow us to take a tour. A truly amazing place assembled from pure dedication, gratitude and love for the Allied troopers that liberated Belgium all those decades ago.

That afternoon was the most emotional and personal of the entire two weeks, and there were many. A couple we had met in France joined us -- Jean Marie and Veronique. He has great knowledge of the area. We had one of dad's Situation Maps on which he had marked his F Company 2nd Squad movements. He had also placed an "X" where his pal Rudy was wounded on the January 24; and an "X" where he was hit the following morning by a sniper's bullet. Jean Marie said he could take us to that spot. After covering a mile or so along an old logging road and then through the pine tree woods we came to the "X". Quite something to contemplate. Two sons were standing near the spot where a young soldier was wounded. Getting there by following the map their father had marked 75 years ago. Photos were taken and we savored the experience before retracing our steps back out.

Our trip was to end in Paris in three days. Normandy was the last stop. Even though the 517 had not been involved in D-Day, one needs to visit this historic WWII area for all that it means to the 'beginning of the end'. We pack our limited amount of time full of as many important sites as possible. Many silent moments. The last stop before driving east to Paris was the American Cemetery sitting above the landing beach of Omaha. Many of those in eternal rest here fell just below these cliffs.

During the flight back to the US it was time for reflection of the two-week sojourn we were returning from. Many aspects made this such a memorable and meaningful time: members of the 517 family, the folks in France and Belgium who opened their homes and hearts to us, and the significant locations we had stood upon. With all of its emotional and personal elements this had truly been "A Magical History Tour".



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Found this article from November 2019 of **Fred E. Brown** (460th PFAB):

<https://www.panews.com/2019/11/22/faith-and-family-wwii-veteran-honored-with-french-medal-fred-brown-clung-to-family-brotherhood-through-tumultuous-fight/>

FAITH AND FAMILY — WWII Veteran honored with French Medal: Fred Brown clung to family, brotherhood through tumultuous fight

By **Cassandra Jenkins**

[Email the author](#)

Published 12:12 am Friday, November 22, 2019



Fred Brown, a longtime Port Arthur resident, was a paratrooper for the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team for the United States Army during World War II. He was honored with the medal of Knight in the French Order of the Legion of Honor Thursday in a private ceremony at the Groves Activity Center. (Cassandra Jenkins/The News)

GROVES — Fred Brown had never been in an airplane. In April 1943, he volunteered to jump out of one.

Drawn by the challenge and the cool looking boots, Brown became a paratrooper in the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team for the United States Army, spinning him into the dangerous journey of World War II.

Fast forward 70 years, and the young man who had never stepped foot in an airplane has become a decorated veteran. Thursday, he added one of the most prestigious French awards to his belt — the medal of Knight in the French Order of the Legion of Honor.

Alexis Andres, the Consul General of France in Houston, presented the medal to Brown Thursday at the Groves Activity Center. As the metal gleamed in its new spot on his jacket, Brown's eyes glazed over as memories of the war wisped through his head.

“One thing I remember about the war, and what helped get me through it, was brotherhood,” Brown said. “When you're fighting a war, you make a lot of friendships you never forget after going through combat together.”

Brown said the brotherhood that he had will always hold a special place in his heart, as will the memories of his family.



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In 1943, Brown was drafted only weeks after meeting the love of his life, Verda Verdis Scott Brown—a young woman who vowed to wait for his return.



Fred Brown, center, was joined by his two daughters, Lois Gregory, left, and Becky Gregory, right, during his award ceremony. (Cassandra Jenkins/The News)

“When I got home, my wife told me she would wait for me,” he said. “She did and we got two beautiful daughters out of it. She was a great wife, she died in 2006 but I remember thinking of her during the war and I missed her. I knew I had to make it home to her.”

Brown said he also missed Port Arthur, a city that has been home to him since 1936.

“I love Port Arthur,” he said. “When I die, I want my ashes cremated and spread over the city. I just love Port Arthur.”

Sitting in his chair, friends and family surrounding him, including his two daughters Lois and Becky Gregory, Brown looked back on every close call that almost kept him from the life he lives now.

“I had so many opportunities to have been killed,” he said. “But it didn’t happen. I think about that all the time, it’s always on my mind.”

Brown fought in Italy before parachuting into Southern France. He fought German forces for 90 days during the battle for Col de Braus and the liberation of Sospel in the Maritime Alps.

Among other service medals, Brown also received the U.S. Bronze Star Medal for his bravery during the Battle of Manhay at the Battle of the Bulge. He also participated in the Rhineland Campaign that secured a route for the Allies into Germany near the end of the war.

Brown said with every fight, he wondered why the men next to him fell and he remained. A question he still has no answer to today.

He chalks it up to faith and guidance.

Upon returning home from the war, not yet 21 years old, Brown returned to Port Arthur with a new vigor and outlook on life. He married the love of his life within weeks and joined First Baptist Church where he became a deacon.

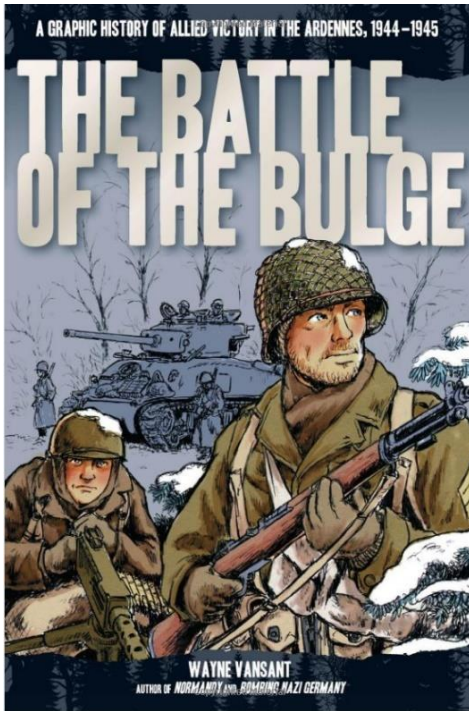


The longtime Port Arthur resident was active in Port Arthur civic affairs, a volunteer for the Lions Club and a longtime deacon at the First Baptist Church in Port Arthur. He is retired from DuPont Credit Union.

Brown also celebrated his 95th birthday Thursday.



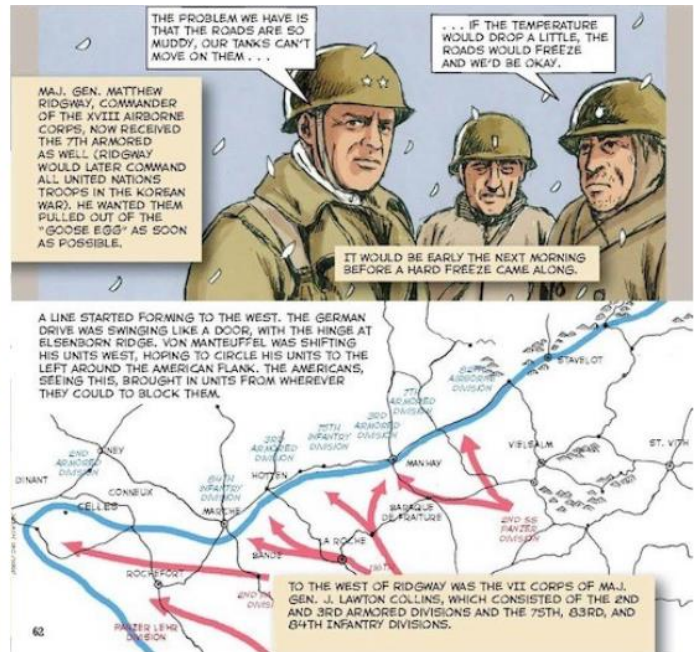
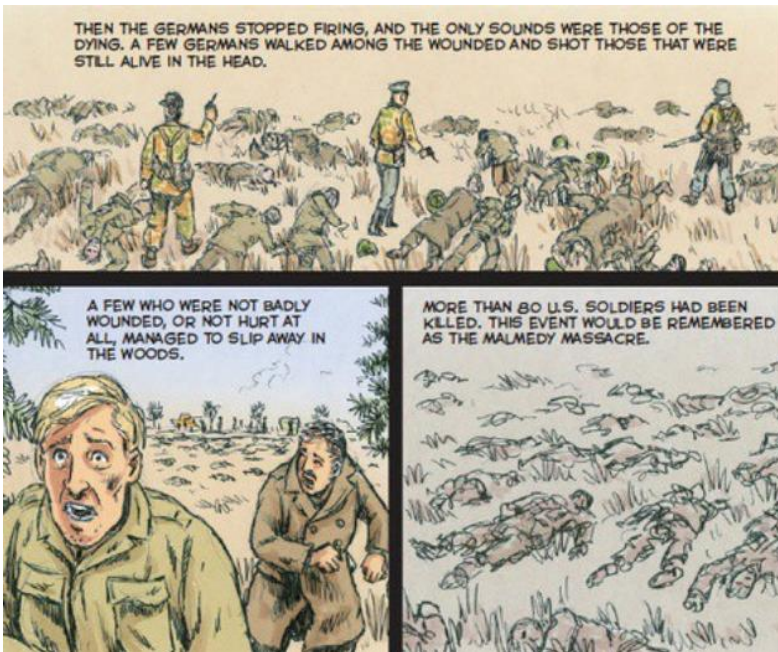
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I ran across this recently on Amazon: *The Battle of the Bulge: A Graphic History of Allied Victory in the Ardennes, 1944-1945*. "A graphic history" – I guess you can't call it a comic book. And it's 104 pages! -- Bob Barrett

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0760346224/>

Sample:

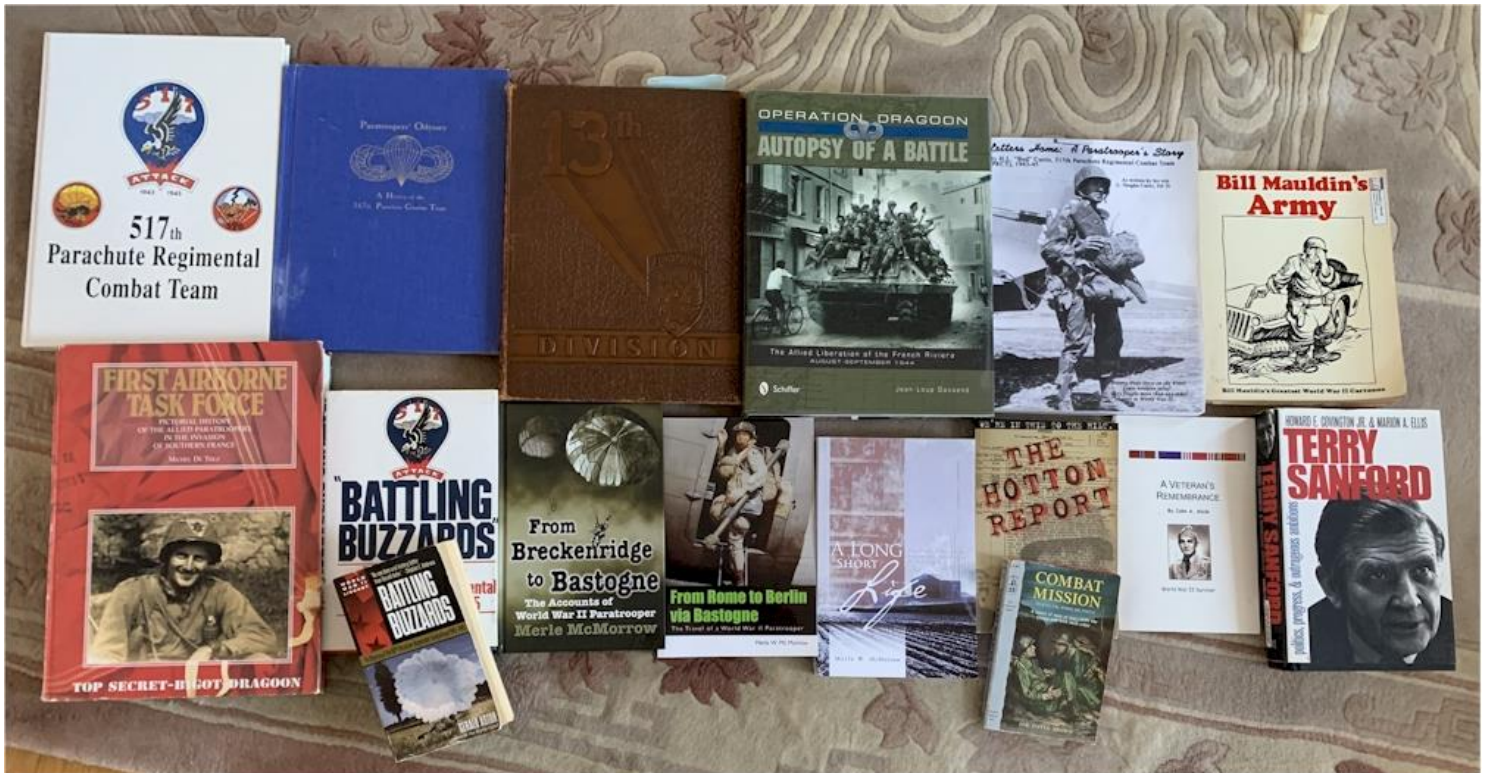
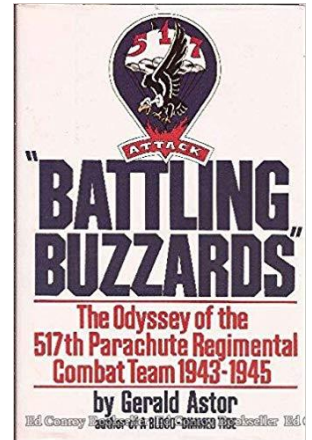




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I just purchased a used, but good condition copy of Gerald Astor's *Battling Buzzards* (1993) from eBay. My old, well-used, paperback version is still around but I never had the original larger hardcover so I thought I'd grab one for \$12.

Below is a picture of most of my 517th books. I'm not a historian, but I'm a pretty good researcher when people want to know about the 517th. These books, some of which are rare, are what I use to answer questions about the 517th. There is actually very little info about the "orphan" 517th on the internet other than our website, and that's why Ben and I decided we had to build the website in the first place. I have digitized some of these books for the website, like *Paratroopers' Odyssey* so that other people can find out about the 517th. One interesting thing is that the website is easy to find, since even on the internet there is almost nothing else that you will find with a search for "517th"



Most of these books are readily available, although a few are pretty rare, such as **Michael De Trez'** *First Airborne Task Force*, and *13th Airborne Division* history (the large brown book). Many of these books were originally my Dad's (**Ben Barrett**, H Company), but I continue to add to the collection. I'm very proud that many of these are autographed by the authors (**Merle McMorrow**, **Lory Curtis**, **John Alicki**) My copy of *Paratroopers' Odyssey* is signed by a lot of the troopers (**Dick Seitz**, **Merle McMorrow**, **Mel Biddle**, **Gene Frice**, **Leo Dean**, **Darrell Egner**, **Gary Davis**, **Gene Brissey**, and many more that are no longer with us. I am also glad that our website is referenced as a source in **Jean-Loop Gassend's** *Operation Dragoon – Autopsy of a Battle*. (I don't want to overstate that. The website is a very minor source compared to all the original research that Jean-Loop did for this monstrous 560-page history.)



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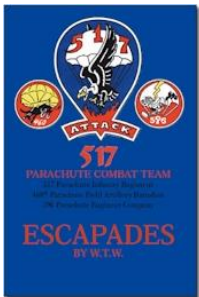
I realized that there are a few books I know that I do not have, including the following:



Eddy Monfort's '[Offensive Des Ardennes](#) (1994).

Ben has a signed copy of this from when it was brand new and Ben visited Belgium and met Eddy in 1995. I think my sister, Joanne must have that copy somewhere.

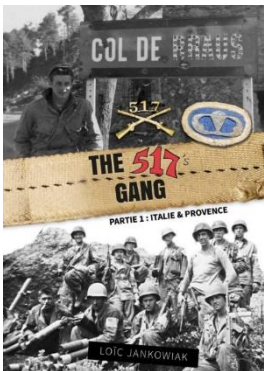
[Not Ready To Die](#) is the autobiography of **Ignacio (Nacho) Ramirez Vasquez**, edited by **Nila Gott**. I thought I had a copy of this, but it's gone missing. :^(



Escapades by "WTW" (**William T. Webb**) -->

I thought I saw this one once, but can't locate it. Nuts.

Some good news is that there are also a few autobiographies that I digitized and put onto the website's [Meet the Troopers](#) page. These are probably not available anywhere else. These include some very detailed war stories by [John Alicki](#), Gene Brissey's "[What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?](#)", William Houston's "[Army Life](#)", Hoyt Kelley's "[World War II Journal](#)", and [War](#) by James E. Mortensen.



And of course, I am looking forward to receiving my copy of **Loïc Jankowiak's** *The 517's Gang*.



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I got the word that **Bob Amerlan** passed away. Can you added it on the mailcall ? He was an exceptional trooper, WWII survivor from Italy to Hürtgen. His daughter Bonnie is a good friend of mine now, he connected us by the passion of his WWII stories. I am very happy to have talk with him a few times. His daughter recorded his wonderful stories and they are saved. You can read a few of them in my incoming English version of my book 'The 517's Gang'.

Best regards,
Loïc J.

Yesterday, I get the new from his daughter that Robert Amerlan, HQ/517th passed away.

First time I get a contact with Bonnie was a few years ago, when I told her I was wriing a book about his father's outfit, the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. She interviewed his father for me and we were able to save many stories from him. His stories are available in my book 'The 517's Gang'. He also tell a little forward of my book which can be read in one of the first pages.

Bob was a survivor of the Italian, Southern France, Battle of the Bulge and German campaign (Hürtgen). In Hürtgen, as he was in an outpost in a blowed house, the house collapsed on him with many soldiers which were instantanly killed. Bob survived but was trapped for several hours before being rescued. All this year, he wished to know from which units the soldiers were from, but I never been able to know...

Today, Bob rest with his wife. I am very fortunate to have 'know' him, even if it was through a webcam and a lot of WWII pictures. Even if the english version of my book did not reach him, I am very proud the french one did. I will remember him all my life.

Loïc Jankowiak





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

In Memorium – Robert J. Amerlan – Reg HQ Company



Robert James Amerlan

Born: August 8, 1923

Died: January 20, 2020

Robert "Bob" James Amerlan, 96 years old, passed away peacefully surrounded by loved ones on 20th of January 2020, at Oak Crest retirement CCF in DeKalb, Illinois.

Bob was born the 8th of August 1923. He was the 2nd eldest of 7 children born to Oscar(John) Amerlan and Lillian (Thomas) Amerlan of Chicago, II.

Bob lived most of his young life in Chicago. After High School he was employed by Western Electric Co. until he entered into the Army during WWII. He volunteered to become a paratrooper and ended up with the "1st

Special Service Force", the elite "517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team."

At the end of WWII he met his future wife Arlene (Block) Amerlan. They were married 70 years before she passed away in 2017. Bob was a devoted husband and father. He loved taking his family on camping trips and fishing. He was always fixing something, a real handyman. He was known for his quick wit and humor.

Bob is survived by his brother, Charles (Valarie) Amerlan, 3 children, James Amerlan, Joyce Amerlan-Schirmer, Bonnie (Ed) Amerlan-Nowinski, his grandchildren, Jaime Amerlan, Steven Amerlan, Jackie (Bob) Schirmer-Franklin, Matt Schirmer, Jeremy(Rocio) Deaton and Shane (Kristen) Deaton and 5 great grandchildren, Samantha and Christina Franklin, Ethan, Ty, Ollie Deaton as well as numerous nieces and nephews, and friends.

Bob is preceded in death by his parents, his siblings, Raymond, John, Lois, Joan and Clyde, his daughter-in-law, Patricia (Ora butt) Amerlan and his youngest grandchild, Abigail R. Schirmer.

"He left us peacefully; this fits for a man who showed quiet strength."

The Celebration of his life will be held on Monday, Jan. 27th from 9:30-11:30 AM at the Butala Funeral Home and Crematory in Sycamore. A service will begin at 11:30 AM on Monday with Pastor Preston C. Fields officiating.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to Honor Flight [Chicago-
www.Honorflightchicago.org/donate](http://www.Honorflightchicago.org/donate)); Click "donate now" and fill in "In Memory of Robert Amerlan" or mail checks to: Honor Flight Chicago, 9701 W. Higgins Rd., Suite 310, Rosemont, IL. 60018-- Memo: In Memory of Robert Amerlan.

Published in the Northwest Herald on Jan. 23, 2020



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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
- 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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