



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



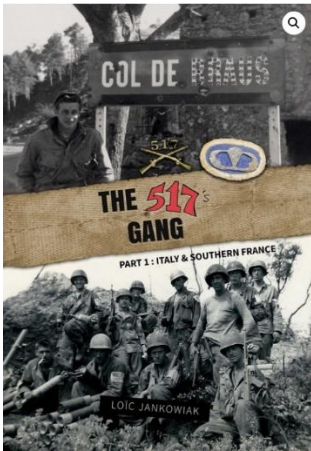
**MailCall No. 2436**

March 1, 2020

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

## *“The 517’s Gang” by Loïc Jankowiak*

### From the book’s **Introduction:**



It is by collecting all these testimonies that I decided to organize them in a coherent and chronological way with the help of other documents and testimonies as well as some present in the few books dedicated to the unit. It is then a long work of investigation which was put in place. The unit was particularly known – for the little it was – for its fights it had delivered in Provence, but the fights in Italy, in the Ardennes and Hürtgen were much more unknown.

The existence of the 517th PRCT appeared to me in 2008 or 2009 when I make historical research on the landing of Provence. The name ‘Wild Bill’ Boyle is probably the first name that I retained, and the reputation of this character has earned me know more about him and his unit. It is probably at this moment that the passion of the “Paratroopers in Southern France” was triggered from where

was born this first book.

In wanting to write about this unit I wanted to repair some kind of injustice that I saw. Like many other units that I'm interested in, the 517th has been shunned, unlike the units that seem to have made their own war alone and which everyone else speaks about. I have always found it amazing how much people persist in always talking about the same things and taking for granted only what is available to them instead of looking further. Hundreds of veterans that people are not interested in die every day, without our realizing it. The world then loses whole parts of history that would never have been lost if some had had more interest in forgotten or little publicized things, that are just as interesting, instead of constantly talking about subjects which have been mentioned in hundreds of publications. It seems that 'doing' the story is too difficult, as are many things in today's world, and that the fashion of 'copy and paste' has been in vogue for some years. I'm afraid, unfortunately, that when people realize the loss of that knowledge and experience, all the veterans will be gone, and when there is finally more interest in it, it will be too late.

The memory and legacy of these men are found, not only in a helmet or a uniform, but also in a diary, a sentence, or a testimony, such as those that were collected for the writing of this book.

Through this book, I hope that others will continue this research and will be more interested in this outfit and will pay tribute to it, without it become the interest of a memory business.



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### FORWARD

World War II was perhaps the most momentous endeavor in the history of this planet. It, more than any other event, shaped our future and provided us with the world in which we now live. There were many thousands who served, fought and sacrificed dearly in World War II to overcome tyranny and give people the better life they now enjoy.

When I was asked to relay my story, my main concern is being in my 90's, I may not be able to recall dates and locations, who commanded who, let alone everyone's name. This author reassured me, he wanted to write about the personal experiences, good or bad, each soldier's story.

As I started to recall my experiences, I could picture it as if it was yesterday even though it was 75 years ago. Some details came back. Some were great, others sad. These men of the 517<sup>th</sup> sacrificed their lives dearly, so that the ideals of peace, freedom and human dignity can be held in high value by those who chose to do so. They were my family, we were each other's hearts and soul.

I would do it all over again. There are many stories of these brave and dedicated people. Many of us are gone now but some of these stories are being told here through personal eyewitness accounts never heard before.

Hopefully these personal testimonies will enable your readers to grasp and appreciate those who served honorably, so that we all, will never forget.

**Pvt. Robert J. 'Bob' Amerlan** (August 1923 - January 2020)  
Regimental Headquarters, 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment

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And here, with Loïc's permission, is a short story from **Fred Beyer**. It is one of many stories in the book that have never been published before. This is from the Chapter "*First Fights in Tuscany*"

**Pvt. Fred Beyer** of I Company is also wounded by the outbreak of these mines: *<< It was here where I saw the first of our dead, and also many of the enemy's. Also tanks that had been hit and burned with the men still in them, mostly German. Before long we ran into some small arms fire, rifle and machine gun, so the firing continued back and forth most of the morning, until we got trapped in the middle of a minefield. The mines were a type called Bouncing Betty (sic.). They had three prongs which stuck up out of the ground about an inch and a half. When one of the prongs was touched the mine comes out of the ground to waist high and explodes, sending metal pellets and fragments in all directions. It was here where I got wounded the first time.*

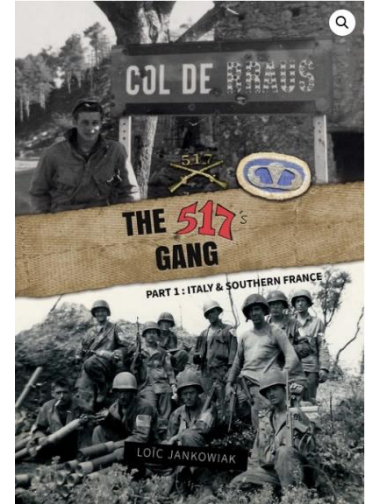
*A medic was working on a soldier that had shrapnel go through his chest, while he put him on his back. While we were working on him, another wounded soldier crawled toward us and set off another mine, killing him and the soldier we were helping, also wounding the medic I was with. If I had not been bending over, I think it could have been curtains for me then. As it was, it took off the back and the bottom button of my pants. I thought for sure my manhood was gone. I was too scared to look. I had a ring with a picture of Mt. Vesuvius on my dog tag chain. A piece of shrapnel split it nearly in half. I gave it to my mother when I came home, I don't know what ever happened to it. I picked up my rifle, it dropped from my hand. My shoulder, arm and hand were numb. It was not until then that I knew that I had been hit in the left shoulder. >>*



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

This newly released English version of *The 517's Gang* by Loic Jankowiak is available for sale at:

<https://1stabtf.com/en/boutique/the-517ths-gang-us-eng-version/>



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RE: Book

I received the three books (for my children) and am extremely happy. It is a great book!!

Loic, thank you very much for all the work you put into it. It is a heritage book for their father **Ignacio (Nacho) Vasquez**.

Thanks,

**Nila Vasquez Gott**

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Bonjour, Loïc!

Today I received my copy of your book about the 517th. Wow. It is much larger, longer, and full of great stories than I had expected. Thanks!

But I also want to let you know that my copy also contained an extra set of paperwork (below) which looks like the mailing label for copies to be sent to Phil Christian. To be clear, I only received my 1 copy of the book, with my own mailing label, but this second label was stuck behind my label. So you were probably looking for this label at some time. Hopefully you figured it out and Phil's copies are still in the way to him.

Regards and thanks,

Bob Barrett

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Hi to both of you.

I probably made a mistake of paper when I sent the package, but I am sure to have made Phil's package correctly. I will check the delivery progress

Thank you to both of you !

Loïc



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

Bob,

Thank you for being helpful and passing along the message to Loic. I'm excited to dive into the book. One copy is for me and the other is for my grandmother, **Sophia Christian**.

Looking forward to the book!

Best,

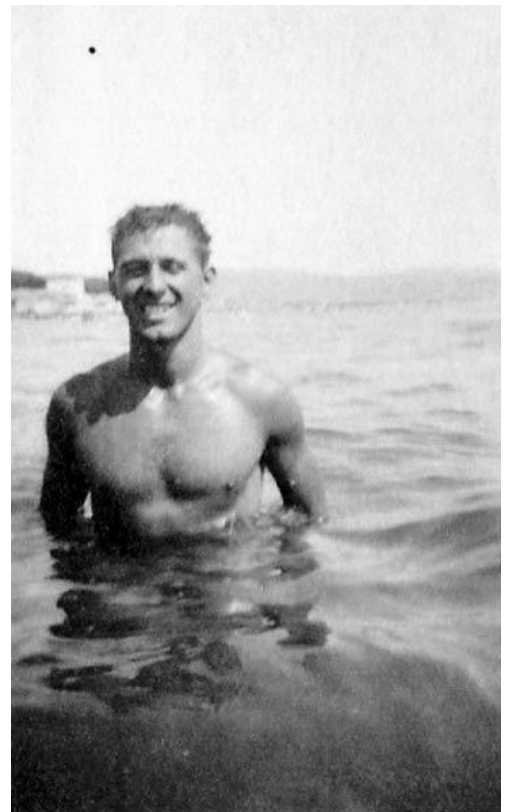
**Philip Andrew Christian**

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Phil's father was **Bill Christian** of the 596<sup>th</sup> PCEC. Bill and **Sophia Christian** were well-known to the 517<sup>th</sup> and 596<sup>th</sup> Associations and hosted many of the West Coast reunions.



Sophia and Bill Christian, 1995



Bill Christian of Brooklyn in Follonica, Italy



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

### Other MailCall News

**Phil McSpadden**

Subject: I/m Back!

I was leaving my apt on Dec 27th when I fell, broke my hip...fractured part of the hip, which with the help of Elmer's Glue and a steel rod was reattached to the rest of my hip, and also broke my femur in a couple of places which were also helped to stay together with the help of another steel rod. Have been gone thru the hospital and then rehab until I was released on Feb 10th....

Right now, I'm pretty much confined to a wheelchair and an attendant for the next several months. The Physical Therapist insist a knee replacement 2 years ago was the culprit as I had had several prior falls, always to the right, and the number of falls had caused a crease that made the buckling of my knee to follow this path to the right....the surgeon denies this, insisting it was a weak muscle was the cause. Whatever, I have to depend on everyone to do everything for me, which is a situation I do not like!!

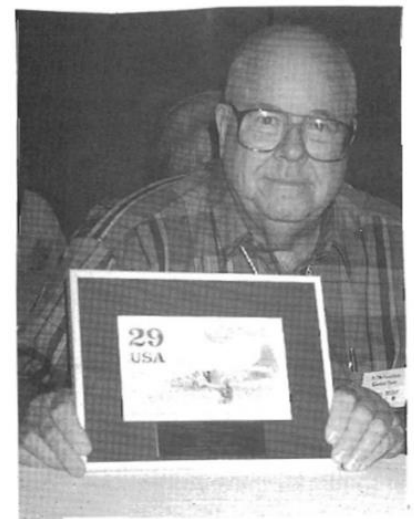
Medicare and private insurance is providing Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and an RN to visit me about 3x a week (each) and the VA is working to get a brace for my right knee to support that weak side and prevent further falls. In the meantime, I cannot stand due to my weak knee, and hopefully, over the next few months that will change.

Lost 20 pounds, which my daughters are stuffing me with anything protein to get some weight back on...all my pants are falling to the floor if I attempt to stand!!!

Love to all of you.

phil

In reviewing an old copy of the 596<sup>th</sup> "Wings" newsletter, I found a note that, in 1994, the US Post Office issued the only postage stamp in honor of the American Airborne. **Joe D. Miller** was the Chairman of the Airborne Commemorative Stamp Committee.



JOE D. MILLER  
FATHER OF THE FIRST AND  
ONLY U.S. AIRBORNE STAMP

From: [http://www.517prct.org/documents/596th\\_newsletters/Wings\\_Fall\\_1995.pdf](http://www.517prct.org/documents/596th_newsletters/Wings_Fall_1995.pdf)



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

29 April 1995  
45 West Grand Avenue  
Astoria, Or. 97103

General James Lindsay  
Airborne and Special Operations Museum  
Suite 200  
316 Green Street  
Fayetteville, North Carolina 28302

Dear General Lindsay,

Tonight's presentation at the 18th annual Airborne Awards Festival marks the end of a long journey for those who labored almost five decades seeking a commemorative stamp honoring the airborne forces. The earliest known appeal was made to the Postmaster General in the late 1940's.

It may baffle future historians as to why this recognition was so long overdue. Certainly, this is still an issue our ranks find difficult to understand. However, it serves no useful purpose for us to recount the heartbreak and bitterness of the past.

"All's well that ends well" is an appropriate adage at this point in our history as the nations premier "on call" military force. The stamp issued last year as part of the WW II series fulfills our dreams and heals most wounds.

The enlarged replica of this stamp given you today is one of only two such reproductions prepared by the U.S. Post Office. The companion facsimile is currently displayed at the Airborne Museum in Ste. Mere Eglise, France.

Your copy is intended for permanent display at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum which you are spearheading. It is presented on behalf of the Postmaster General, Marvin Runyon, the Department of Defense 50th Anniversary Commemoration Committee, and the Airborne Commemorative Stamp Committee, Joe D. Miller, Chairman and Don Lassen, Sponsor.

These words are inscribed on the plaque attached to the stamp. "Given in Grateful Memory And Deep Affection For All Airborne Personnel Serving our Nation Since 1940. Let Those Who So Dared Forever Know How Indebted Are We who Love This Land. The WW II Committee added the caption "A Grateful Nation Remembers".

May future generations visit your new facility and view with pride the contribution their forefathers made to the preservation of freedom and democratic societies around the world.

Respectfully,

Joe D. Miller, Chairman  
Airborne Commemorative Stamp Committee

Our own Joe D. Miller will forever be recognized as the Father of the first and only American Airborne postage stamp.  
Editor



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

Great pictures in this Mail Call especially of the crossroads with the signs pointing to Le Muy and La Motte. The area certainly looks a lot different than the time that Alan and I first visited it more than 40 years after the drop.

### **Pat Seitz**

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Hi Charlie (O'Neil),

I did respond to you note in last week's MailCall <http://517prct.org/mailcall/2435.pdf>, including a picture of your dad with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon at an airfield in in Italy.

I also found this photo in an old 596<sup>th</sup> newsletter:



Don O'Neil in 1944  
in France



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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.

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