



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

**MailCall No. 2450**

October 25, 2020

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

## *Robert L. Smathers – C Company, Pathfinder*



**Robert L. Smathers, 95,** passed away a few hours ago.

Robert Smathers suffered a stroke a few days ago and couldn't recover from it. He was part of the 517th Pathfinder Platoon and testifies to his D-day of Operation Dragoon in the book 'The 517's Gang'

Only one pathfinder remains with us today, which was part of the 3rd stick of the 517th Pathfinder Platoon. His name is **Henry Filipzcak.**

During the realization of this book, I had the opportunity to speak with three men of the 517th Pathfinder Platoon, and be in touch with many families. Anthony Mandio and Robert Smathers were among the

three interviewed. I remember interviewing Bob Smathers right after he went to the dentist! But that didn't bother him too much. His Texas accent in addition to his speaking difficulties did not prevent him from testifying. – **Loïc Jankowiak**

✓ To know more about, the English version of the book 'The 517's Gang' is available only on : <https://cutt.ly/Byyjie1>



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

### **Robert Louis Smathers**

**NOVEMBER 6, 1924 – OCTOBER 21, 2020**



**Robert Louis Smathers**, born Nov 6, 1924, went to be with the Lord on Oct 21st ,2020. He was a beloved Son, Husband, Father, Grandfather, and Great Grandfather. The world lost a wonderful man full of life, wit, and integrity. He will be missed dearly by all.

Born in Canton, NC to Arlie E. and Minnie E. Smathers, he moved to Texas in his early teens, and attended Pasadena HS.

Robert joined the Army in 1943. He served in the European Theatre of Operations in the "517 PRCT". He fought in Operation Dragoon, The Battle of the Bulge, and other European campaigns. He was decorated with 5 Bronze Stars, 1 Bronze Arrowhead, a Bronze Star Medal for Bravery, The Purple Heart, and a Good Conduct Medal. Later in his life he was also awarded with The Legion of Honour Medal from France. He was honorably discharged in Nov 1945.

After the War, he married his high school sweetheart Mara Kathryn McClary on April 25th,1946. Married for 65 years, they raised three daughters on Galveston Bay, where he remained until his passing. He worked at Champion Papers for 34 years until 1983. He was the President of Houston Paper and Pulp Mill Workers Union in 1953, then later became the Paper Mill Maintenance Section Superintendent. He started his own business in 1982, Bay Products, Inc., which is still operating today. He was a member of Sunset Methodist Church, where at one time he served on the Board of Directors.

Throughout his life, he cherished his memories by the bay with his friends and family. He enjoyed golfing, boating, fishing, and entertaining his other "children"- his beloved Chihuahuas Toto and Teenie.

He is preceded in death his wife Mara K, his parents, sister, brother, niece, and son in law Bill.

He is survived by Nina and Steve Loftis, Nita Clements, Nanette Coco, 7 Grandchildren and 11 Great Grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, Gift can be made in memory to the Galveston Bay Foundation at [www.galvbay.org/donate](http://www.galvbay.org/donate) or by mail to 1725 Hwy 146, Kemah, Tx 77565.



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

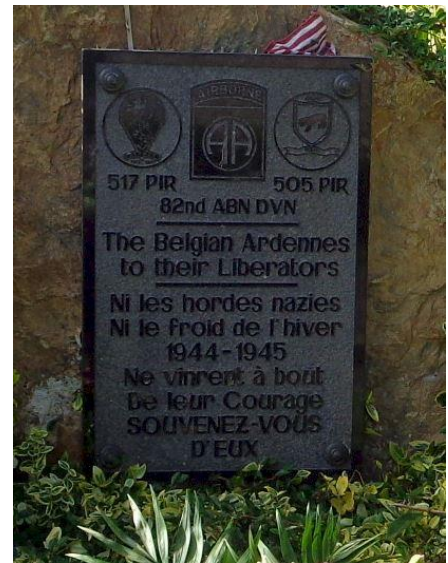
## MailCall News

October 10, 2020

Dear friends of America,

we do hope you are OK and safe. We do hope you are resting and staying in good health in spite of the virus- Here is a picture at the monument in St Jacques with the flowers of Gilles DANNIAU in July. The boys are Théo and Julien ( Victorine 's grand sons) We think of you with gratitude and respect.

**Irma and Arnold TARGNION** \_ Trois-Ponts (Belgium)





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



From Facebook:

Is there anyone who Can help me with this one? Private Mike Stanko. Any help is appreciated!  
– Bart Posman

I found 1 item in the 517th Morning reports from F Company. **Mike D. Stanko** joined F Company 8-Mar-1945. (From Company D??)

MORNING REPORT				
RESTRICTED				
2400	8	March	194	45
ORGANIZATION Co F 517th Procht Inf Regt Int				
STATION OR LOCATION Joiny, France 675 - 410				
NAME	SERIAL NUMBER	GRADE	NOB	CODE
Skaratan, Russel O	39474096	Pvt	7745	
Smith, Jack B	42095013	Pvt	7745	
Spencer, Paul A	39053570	Pvt	7745	
Stanko, Mike	42095098	Pvt	7745	
Stedine, William D	42095066	Pvt	7745	
Szappan, Steve H	36989659	Pvt	7745	
Valla, Gregorio M	38677771	Pvt	7745	
Walker, Curtis Jr	37733455	Pvt	7745	
Walker, Wayne J	37746101	Pvt	7745	
Above EM (15) asgd & jd Co fr Co D, this Regt per Par 1 30, #40 Hq 517th Procht Inf APO 333 USA.				
Goyner, Allie J	39618078	Sgt	7745	
Tomlson, Walter	R20538594	Pvt	7745	
Above 2 EM fr dy, to sk in, grs NBC (LD).				
RECORD OF EVENTS				
Usual Guard & Camp duties				
LIMITED ASSIGNMENT PERSONNEL: None.				
ASGD	ASGD	TOTAL	PRESENT	ABSENT
			POB	NOT PRE



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

I hope we are still getting emails. And I hope you are okay (healthy).

I haven't gotten any emails since August (and it went into spam). I have a new computer and the email is different.

Hopefully, you still will continue the emails. I have a vet from Viet Nam (paratrooper) that I send them to. He recently lost a leg because of Agent Orange.

**Nila Gott**

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Hi Bob. Can you check to see if I am still on your mailing list as I have not gotten any emails since July 19, 2020.

Thanks

,  
**Al Eckart**

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Hi Nila, Al, and everyone else,

Yes, I have been way behind on MailCalls. I just realized that the last one was in August. Usually, I'll work on MailCall while watching football on Sundays. And that hasn't happened this year.

You can read and search old emails at: <http://517prct.org/mailcall/index.htm>  
Send some news!

Bob Barrett

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

Submitted by	Comments:
Name: <b>P Hamilton</b> From: INDIANA E-mail: <a href="mailto:paigehamilton@yahoo.com">paigehamilton@yahoo.com</a>	I recently received a yard-long unit photo, of the support company of the 517th taken in GA. Perfect, still on the cardboard tube. I would like to know its value. Thank you
	Added: October 18, 2020

**Admin reply:** *That could be the 517 Service Company at Camp Toccoa, GA 1944. I don't know the value, but it's probably worth something to a family member.*

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

Dear Sir,

My ex father in law was a member of the 517th. His name was **William Tanona**, service number 31036324 . We believe he was an original member of the 505th and transferred into the 517th September 1944. I have attached a photo that shows him with a group of troopers, we are not sure where or when the photo was taken or who the other troopers are. Bill is on the left side of the photo with the highly polished paratrooper boots .I remember him telling me how much pride paratroopers took in their boots.

Perhaps family members may recognize the other men in the photo or know where it was taken.

Best regards and many thanks

**Bryden Chirnside**



Hi Bryden,

Thanks for the info. On a quick look at Morning reports, I can see the he officially joined H Company in Southern France on Oct 6, 1944. My dad, **Ben Barrett** also was in H Company and joined around the same time. They are both listed on the December 1944 roster, both as CPLs, so I'm sure they knew each other!

I also have morning reports records of his promotions to CPL and SGT. And LWA in March 1945. Do you want copies of those morning reports?

I don't recognize that photo, but someone might.

[Note: I don't recognize any of the insignia, or the hats, from any 517<sup>th</sup> uniforms.]

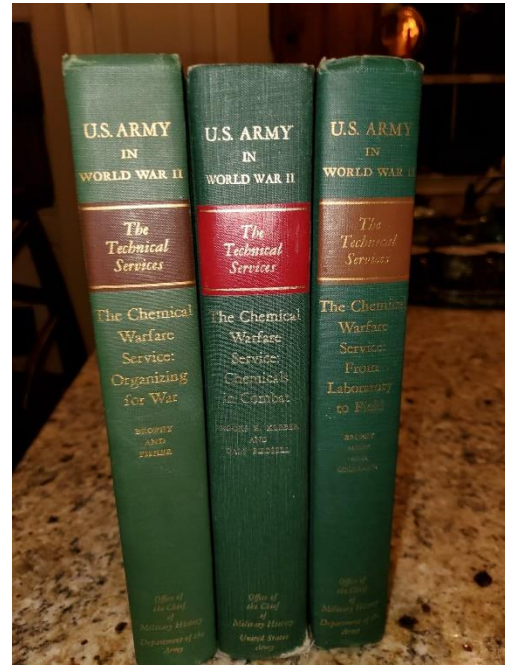
Bob Barrett



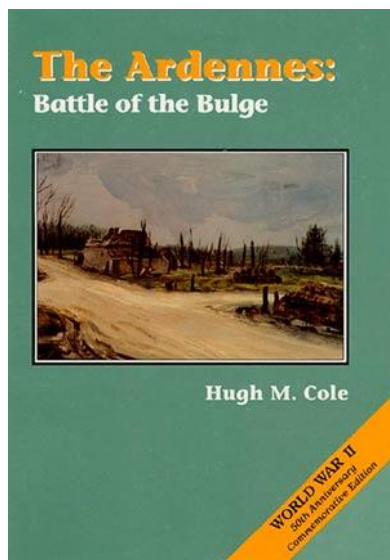
## 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team

An old friend of mine, who just happens to be a historian for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Chemical Battalion, (also part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Task Force in Operation Dragoon), noted this is a Facebook post:

*After World War II the U.S. Army published "The U.S. Army in World War II," 100 volumes of history, requiring more than 40 years to complete. The "Green Books" include not only detailed accounts of air and land combat in every theater, but also accounts of non-combat aspects such as logistics, weapon design and purchase, and military police. I still remember the excitement I felt when I first saw a full set stretched out on two very long shelves in the Middleton Library. In the front of every volume, on an otherwise blank page, is found the terse dedication "...to Those Who Served" which often brings tears to my eyes. Its simple power acknowledges not only the fallen, but also the 18 million Americans who spent months and years of their lives in the myriad of diverse, sometimes mundane, and often tedious roles necessary to conduct the first modern war. I have known men who spent years on Pacific islands impregnating battle clothing with chemicals to protect other soldiers against gas attacks that never occurred. Ernie Pyle wrote of a unit that spent the war repairing shoes for the armies advancing across France. Hollywood stars and camera crews made training films. For many that I have spoken with, their service was the central experience of their lives. Never again would they feel so strongly that what they did mattered, that they were part of something so much bigger than themselves. The Green Books honor all of them.*



<https://history.army.mil/.../bookshelves/collect/usaww2.html>



In the past, I have referenced part of the Ardennes volume of this series, written by Hugh Cole. -- BB

[https://history.army.mil/html/books/007/7-8-1/CMH\\_Pub\\_7-8-1.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/007/7-8-1/CMH_Pub_7-8-1.pdf)



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

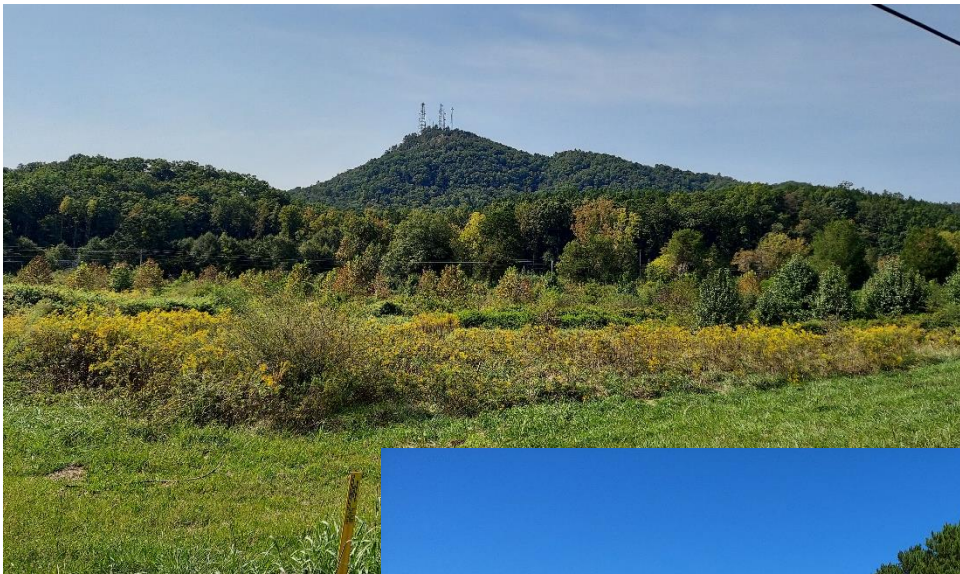
October 7, 2020

Hi Bob.

Even though the military weekend in Toccoa was canceled this year, **Joe Boyle** and myself still made it. Here are a few updated photos of the camp. The 517th barracks is being constructed and the C47 fuselage has a coat of OD green and the landing gear is ready to be attached. Hope to see people there next year.

**Jim Kraus**

(friend of **Earl Boone**, F Company)







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

My dad, **Ray Helms** of E-Company, had a small box with some items from the WW2 era and his time in service. I'm sending copies of a few items that may be interesting.

1. A copy of the words to a song titled "He Ain't Gonna Jump No More". I'd be surprised if you haven't seen this before, but I thought I would send it just in case. I don't know if this song is unique to the 517th or was something shared by all paratroopers.
2. A copy of the message from **Lt. Col. Graves** that was communicated to each of the 517th troopers before their jump in southern France.
3. Photo of an item that appears to be some kind of small handmade cutting tool. It's only a few inches long. I'd like to know if anyone else has seen anything like it and what it may have been used for.
4. Photo of something that appears to be a wooden POW identification tag. My dad was never a POW to the best of my knowledge, but his brother was a POW in Germany. The tag clearly has the number "XI B" above a 6-digit number. When researching it online I actually found a tag that looked exactly like it. Above the number it said "Stalag XI B". I'm assuming this tag belonged to my uncle. He was in the Army, but I don't know what unit he served with. Does this tag look familiar to anyone who was a German POW or is the relative of a German POW?

Thanks,

**Glenn Helms**





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

"HE AIN'T GONNA JUMP NO MORE"

"Is everybody happy?" Cried the Sergeant looking up.  
Our hero feebly answered, "Yes," and then they hooked him up.  
He jumped right out into the blast  
And grabbed at his reserve,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

CHORUS:

Gory, Gory, what a Helluva way to die,  
Gory, Gory, what a helluva way to die,  
Gory, Gory, what a helluva way to die,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

He counted loud, he counted long, he waited for the shock,  
He felt the wind, he felt the clouds, he felt the awful drop  
It jerked the cord, the silk spilled out  
And wrapped around his legs,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

CHORUS:

The lines were twisted round his neck, connectors broke his dome,  
The risers tied themselves in knots  
Around each shinny bone,  
The canopy became his shroud as he hurtled to the ground,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

CHORUS:

The days he'd lived and loved and laughed,  
Kept running through his mind, <sup>HE</sup>  
He thought about the medics and wondered what they'd find,  
He thought about the girl back home, the one he'd left behind.  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

CHORUS:

The ambulance was on the spot, the jeeps were running wild,  
The medics jumped and screamed with glee,  
They rolled their sleeves and smiled,  
For it had been a week or more since last a chute had failed,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

CHORUS:

He met the ground, the sound was "SPLAT", the blood went spurting high,  
His comrades then were heard to say, "What a beautiful way to die,  
They picked him up, still in his chute,  
And poured him from his boots,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.

CHORUS:

**There was blood upon the risers, there was blood upon his chute,**  
There was blood that came a'trickling down the paratrooper's boot,  
As he lay there rolling  
In the welter of his gore,  
And he ain't gonna jump no more.



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

TOP SECRET

HEADQUARTERS 517TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY CT  
APO 758, U. S. ARMY

Copy #27

11 August 1944

1. The following general considerations should be noted in the operation now being undertaken.

a. For most of us this is our first combat jump. Consequently some may be a little apprehensive. Remember that the advantage is with the attacker, as the enemy does not know exactly how or when he is going to be struck. Particularly in an airborne operation in which we land in his rear areas where his CP's, lines of communication and supply echelons are set-up, will our activities give him grave concern. The enemy consequently will be a lot more apprehensive than we are. That the enemy will react to our landing by movement of forces towards our area should be expected within a few hours. However by that time we expect to be pretty well set for him and deal out a lot of punishment. It must be remembered also that he will be engaged at many other points by other airborne units and the large scale attack by the amphibious landing. There can be no doubt of the success of this operation if we use our heads and keep our confidence, work quickly but smoothly and act aggressively using good tactics and security measures.

2. As it will be dark when we first land it will be difficult to see what is going on around us. Therefore, we must not start firing promiscuously at any thing that moves. You must be certain it is the enemy before you fire. After the first unit lands many of our men will be moving around the area, some already in assembly or moving to assembly positions and others recovering bundles. Don't fire first and find it is one of your own men later. Weapons, on landing, should be loaded and locked, and fired only on orders of an officer or in case of emergency. The sound of enemy weapons is known to you and should disclose the location of enemy forces if present. Enemy flares may be fired around the area to give the appearance of enemy strength and to cause us to be alarmed. Remember that more casualties can be caused by some of our own men getting trigger happy than from enemy fire. It is possible that your stick may land some distance from the DZ. Your action in this case should be considered. The general idea is to move to your Battalion assembly area and if the Battalion has already left for its objective join them there. If this is impossible join up with friendly troops preferably of this unit and assist them in accomplishing their mission. In either case do as much damage as possible on the way, for example a staff car or a truck load of Germans may be driving along the road unaware of your presence in the area. In case no officers are present with your group the senior NCO should be prepared to take over. All men will be issued instructions regarding the terrain, objectives, important towns, streams etc., and also a map in the escape kit. Remember that a few men can create a hell of a lot of trouble if they happen to be in the right place.

(OVER)

TOP SECRET



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

TOP SECRET

3. Due to lack of transport in landing and the difficulties of supply, don't expect an easy time. However, I am confident that this outfit can take care of itself in any situation that may arise. May success reward our efforts, and good hunting to each and every one of you.

*R. D. Graves*  
R. D. GRAVES,  
Lt. Col., 517th Prcht Inf  
Commanding.

*This is the message that was read to each man  
before he jumped in Southern France, 15 Aug 44.*

TOP SECRET

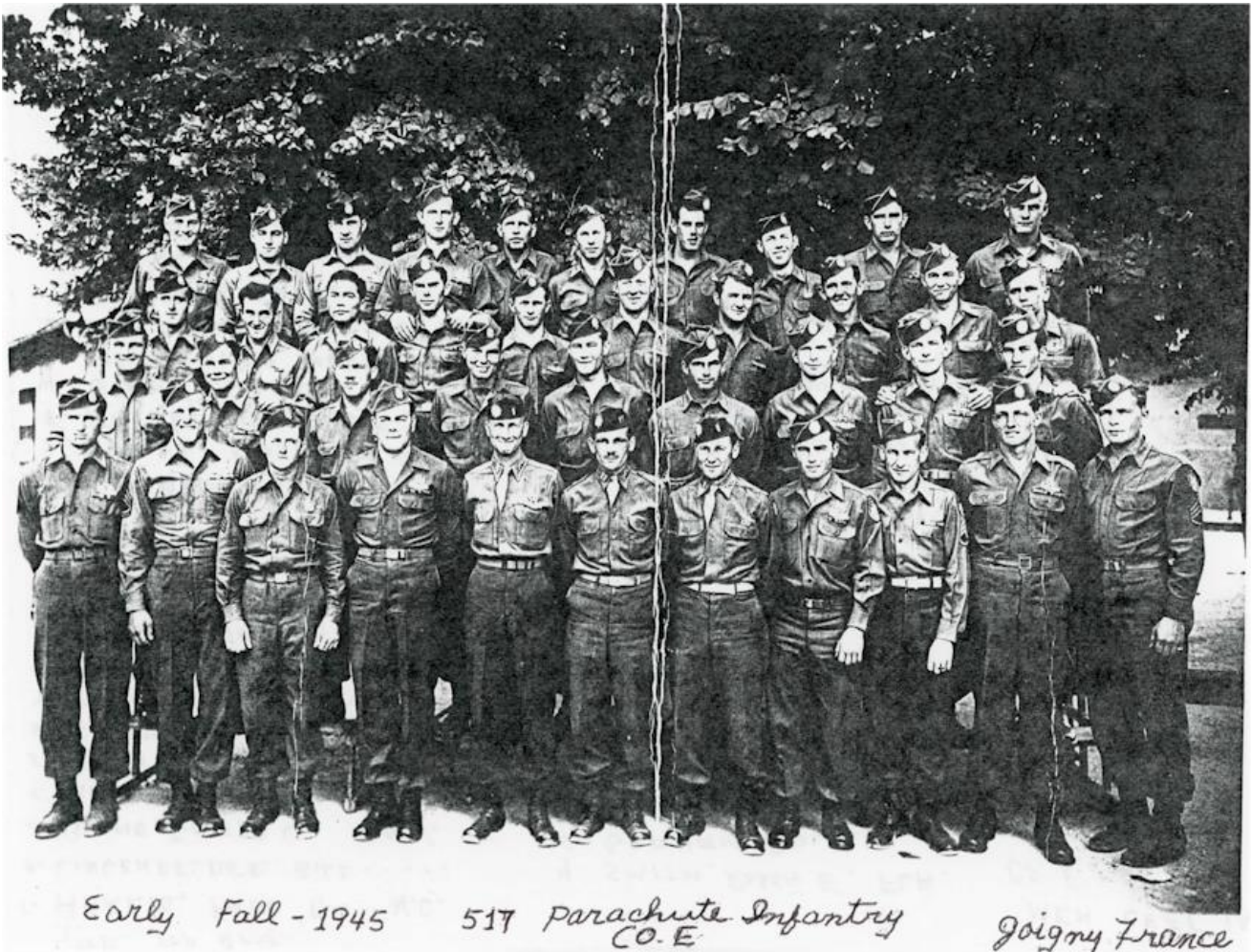


## 517<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team

I'm attaching a version of the E-Company photo at Joigny that I haven't seen on the web site. It's a photocopy that I found in my dad's (**Ray Helms**) memorabilia from the war. Notice that in this photo the troopers on the front row are standing, not sitting as they are in the version I've seen on the web site. The troopers names are recorded on the back of the photo. I don't know who recorded the information on the photo. It could have been my dad. It looks similar to his printing, but since it's a copy of a photo, it could have been someone else.

I assumed this photo had been taken in June 1945, but the note on this photo says it was taken in "Early Fall - 1945". Also, the note written in the upper right hand corner of the back of the photo indicates that there were 46 troopers remaining from the original E-Company, with 6 missing from the photo. There are 40 troopers in the photo. I don't know who the missing 6 troopers were and why they were missing. Also, if there were only 46 left from the original E-Company, what happened to the rest of them? I know some were KIA or WIA, but where were all the others? I assume this photo was probably taken not long before the 517th returned to the U.S. Is it possible other survivors of the original E-Company had already been reassigned to other units of the Army when this photo was taken? I know my dad was reassigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, 504th PIR, 3rd Battalion in Berlin, and I know he was there by 8/17/45 because I have some type of Berlin District Pass that was issued to him on that date.

Thanks,  
**Glenn Helms**





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

- 1<sup>st</sup> Row
- |                           |                         |   |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1. HARRIS, PAUL T. N.C.   | 4. SMITH, ROSSA E. FLA. | MEN LEFT IN<br>CO. E OF THE 517<br>46.<br>6 MISSING |
| 2. LINGENFELDER, BILL     | 5. GRAHAM, GALE         |   |
| 3. BOONE, JOSEPH C. N.J.  | 6. KISS, STEVE J. MICH. |   |
| 4. MILLER, OSCAR G. OKLA. | 8. CHAMPION, GORDAN     |   |
| 5. PRYER, JACK H.         | 9. EDWARDS, BILLY R.    |   |
| 6. KRUMM, JOHN H. MINN.   | 10. FRANKO, JOHNNY M.   |   |
| 7. MORRISON, WINFORD      |                         |   |
| 8. GRIFFIN, JOHN J.       |                         |   |
| 9. SLIKER, DONALD I.      |                         |   |
| 10. ODELL, DARRIL TEXAS   |                         |   |
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Row
- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. SCHLAPF, ADOLPH J. OHIO   | 1. RACICH, PETER F. ILL.                       |
| 2. LESIAK, CASIMIR A. OHIO   | 2. KREYCHE, EUGENE A. ILL.                     |
| 3. HAILEY, EUGENE E. OKLA.   | 3. GETCHUS, HARVEY                             |
| 4. GINN, CHARLES P.          | 4. HIGGENBOTHAM, KENNETH                       |
| 5. McILRAVEY, RICHARD L.     | 5. BREARLEY, JOHN E. 1 <sup>st</sup> LT. WASH. |
| 6. ZYLOWSKI, STANLEY J. OHIO | 6. NEWBERRY, ROBERT H. CAPT. GA.               |
| 7. STEWARD, CHESTER E. COLO. | 7. WEDDIE, JOHN W. 1 <sup>st</sup> LT.         |
| 8. KLINGELHOEFER, A.P. ILL.  | 8. WOODY, JOHN, L. OKLA.                       |
| 9. STUBBS, ORVILLE           | 9. SMITH, WOODROW, W. VIRGINIA                 |
| 10. BRAMI, RUSSEL M. MICH.   | 10. LANDRETH, LANDRUM S.C.                     |
|                              | 11. MEDONICH, DANIAL, J.                       |
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Row
- |                                |
|--------------------------------|
| 1. HELMS, RAY V. N.C.          |
| 2. RYDZINSKI, LAWRENCE E. ILL. |
| 3. HEDGEPETH, MARX G. WYO.     |

Interesting. I haven't seen this version before. All I know is this is the group that started in Toccoa and stayed with the 517th through the war into Joigny. So the missing would include KIA, wounded, and transferred. I'll have to do the math and see if it makes sense compared to casualty reports. On a quick look, there were 177 members of E Company in the December 1944 roster, not counting "attached" men. And we know some were wounded/killed and some transferred in by then. Many wounded also returned to the unit.

So the 60 men on the photo are about 1/3 of the original unit's size.

I'll pull some numbers out of the casualty reports, but I doubt we can explain that many missing.

Bob Barrett



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

## 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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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>
Thunderbolt Archives	<a href="http://www.517prct.org/archives">www.517prct.org/archives</a>

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Some quotes from old Hollywood Squares shows:

Q. Do female frogs croak?  
A. Paul Lynde: If you hold their little heads under water long enough.

Q. If you're going to make a parachute jump, at least how high should you be?  
A. Charley Weaver: Three days of steady drinking should do it.

Q. True or False, a pea can last as long as 5,000 years?  
A. George Gobel: Boy, it sure seems that way sometimes.

Q. You've been having trouble going to sleep. Are you probably a man or a woman?  
A. Don Knotts: That's what's been keeping me awake.

Q. According to Cosmopolitan, if you meet a stranger at a party and you think that he is attractive, is it okay to come out and ask him if he's married?  
A.. Rose Marie: No, wait until morning.