



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

**MailCall No. 2455**

December 6, 2020

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

### *Kaare Allan Johnson, 596<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Engineer*



Our great friend, Allan Johnson, passed away, peacefully at home with his family on November 20, 2020.

Allan was the final and longest serving President of the 517th Association, our alumni group. Allan volunteered to run the Association in 2011, and helped during the sad but necessary dissolution of the association, including the transfer of assets and memorabilia to the Camp Toccoa at Currahee museum in Georgia. <https://www.camptoccoaatcurrahee.org/>

Like all the 517<sup>th</sup> troopers, Allan will be remembered as a selfless volunteer soldier during WWII, as a great family man, and the most wonderful representative of the 517th especially during the last 20 years in various roles for the Association in reunions in the US, Belgium and France. He attended celebrations in Southern France almost annually for many years.

Pfc. K. Allan Johnson, from Staten Island, NY and Hackettstown, NJ will be remembered as our President Emeritus.



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### **Kaare Allan Johnson**

**Awarded the Croix de Guerre and the French Legion of Honor**

Kaare Allan Johnson, loving husband, father and grandfather, died peacefully at home on November 30, 2020. He was 96.

Allan was born on May 21, 1924 at home on Staten Island, NY, to Hildeborg Teresie (Teresa) Torjesson Vehus and Henry Johnson. His wife, Norah Patricia Ewell of Richmond, VA, preceded him in death in 1998, as did his younger brother, Kurt Viking Johnson in 2018.

He graduated from Curtis High School before entering the Army in 1943, volunteering for the paratroops. He served in the 596 Parachute Engineers in the 517th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team, parachuting into southern France on August 15, 1944 as part of Operation Dragoon, the second-largest airborne invasion of the war. Injured in September 1944, he rejoined his outfit at the very end of active combat in early 1945. Allan returned home to his relieved family just days before Christmas in 1945.

Allan attended Harvard University before graduating from Wagner College in 1952, completing a master's degree in 1960. He married Patricia in 1960 and had two daughters, Claire and Laura. He worked as a middle school social studies teacher for 34 years, 29 of them for Mendham Borough, until 1989. In retirement, he worked until early 2020 at Ramsey Outdoor as a sales associate. He was a past president of the Association of New Jersey Rifle and Pistol Clubs, and served on their board.

In 1999, Allan reconnected with his airborne band of brothers, attending reunions and returning to France - a lifelong dream. These visits became a summer staple as he returned to support heartfelt commemorations and gave rise to international friendships, culminating in his final visit in 2019 for the 75th anniversary of Operation Dragoon. He was a proud recipient of the French Croix de Guerre, the French Legion of Honor, and the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal, conferred in April of 2020.

He is survived by his daughter, Laura Kosmich, of Stanhope, his daughter Claire and husband James Giblin of Hillsborough, his grandson Christopher Flynn Giblin and Jacquelyn Simone of Queens, and his grandson Timothy Allan Giblin and Mariam Tsilosani of Manhattan. He is also survived by his nieces, nephews and friends everywhere. Truly curious about people and life, he never met a stranger.

Cremation has taken place. Due to the current health crisis, a memorial will be planned for spring or summer of 2021. Donations may be made in his memory to Camp Toccoa at Currahee (<https://www.camptoccoaatcurrahee.org/>), PO Box 193, Toccoa, GA 30577. You may honor his memory daily with a kind word to another.

To Plant Memorial Trees in memory, please visit our [Sympathy Store](#).

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2<sup>nd</sup> squad, 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon of the 596<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Engineer Company within a few hours of the Operation Dragoon takeoff.

All these men will be part of the "Lost Legion" of Melvin Zais, having been parachuted in error between Fayence and Montauroux!

Allan Johnson, back row, far left

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From All Johnson's biography. (I'll get the whole biography on the website very soon.)

In August, they moved north to various airfields near Grosseto. At one point, some of them got to a beach and they could see the small island of Elba off the coast, famous as Napoleon's first place of exile.

There were various airfields, most of them simply unpaved open space. The day before the jump, August 14, was spent loading equipment, getting everything ready. Our company was split up at the same time, depending on which battalion they were going to accompany. My platoon, the third, was attached for the mission to the third battalion, commanded by **Colonel Melvin Zais**. (Mel Zais would eventually become a 4-star general.)

The night before the jump, we all saw a movie. I think it was "Up in Mabel's Room," kind of a comedy. Afterwards, we were all served coffee by a group of middle-aged women who were called the Gray Ladies. The look on some of their faces reminded me of the look on my mother's face when I'd left for the Army. It would have been a good movie scene. We were shone by the lights of the Jeep the proposed landing strip, which of course is not where we landed. They told us it was 1300 yards long and had a peculiar shape, kind of an elongated U, or a U with wings on either side. Anyway, We were told to assemble after the jump at southern end of the field, and not to load our rifles before the jump. They were afraid we'd get in a firefight with our own troops.

I don't think anyone can forget the final words from Colonel Zais, before we loaded. "I'm not going into France worrying about what the God-damned Tedeschi (Italian for Germans) is going to do to me. I'm going into France thinking about what I am going to do to the God-damned Tedeschi."



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I remember that our stick was composed of 16 men, including the officer. Our officer was **Lt. Zaveterro**. The flight was several hours over the sea and to the south of France. We spent the flight talking and smoking; there was very little to be seen except the occasional signal flare, probably from one of the lead planes. I can't remember what we were yakking about, but no one was asleep, and we'd been up all day and this was going to be all night. We were not fired upon during our approach at all.

We were the last night jump. At about 4:30 am, we jumped. I still remember the sudden silence, because we were away from the plane and that noisiness. We used to call the oscillations "swings." I landed very softly with the canopy draped over a small tree, after about only two oscillations, which meant that we were very close to the ground. My feet were perhaps two feet off the ground. I had a trench knife tied to my boot, with which I cut the risers. That knife was sharp as hell, and I succeeded in cutting my risers and the thinnest layer of skin off my first finger. After getting the harness off and reassembling my rifle, one of the first people I saw was carrying a Tommy gun and told me, "They've dropped us in the wrong place." In addition to that, he looked about as nervous as I felt.

Several hours were spent trying to figure out where we were. There was a small cottage near the spot where I landed, and some officers spoke with the person there, who was obviously very nervous. He looked at me, and pointed out toward the surrounding area, and said, "Look," meaning, we think, "Watch out." By that time it was daylight, and it turned out we'd been dropped across the town of Calian. I saw that I had landed at the top of a ravine, and there were parachutes all over the place, across the ravine. Before we regrouped and started moving, we could hear gunfire coming from across the village. It turned out that Squirrel had been involved in that gunfight, and taken a 9mm bullet in the shoulder from a German Burp gun, but we didn't know this until after he returned from the hospital.

By daylight, I saw two British paratroopers coming up out of the ravine, and their first words were, "A fine bloody fucking pair of Pathfinders we are."

In recent years, I have talked to a British trooper of the Second Brigade, who we often see in the south of France, and he assured me that all of their British Pathfinders had been dropped in their proper places. I did not argue, but I know what I saw.

It took until 9am for the troops to be organized and moved out. Actually, we spent some time that morning, while waiting, talking to some of the young local girls who'd come out to see the action, and maybe to pick up their parachutes. It was reported that the first clothing appeared on the streets by noon.

Alas, as far as being charming with the local girls, they did not have enough time to pursue any romance.

Finally, the battalion had gathered enough men to move out and know where they were going. Going down into a large valley, we saw that there had been a battle there, where a truck or bus had been shot up.

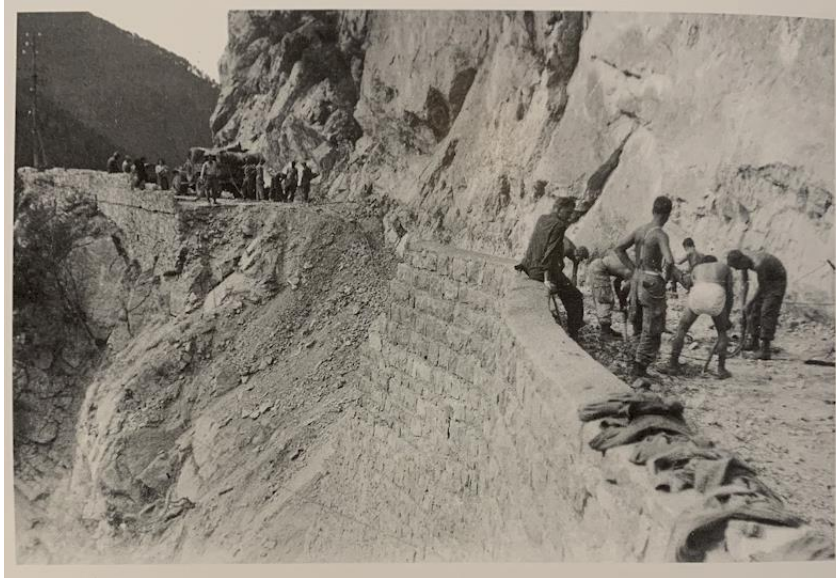
We marched until nightfall and bivouacked. We were told that just before dark, we'd met up with part of the British Independent Second Brigade.

I didn't see any of this, but all those who'd been injured on the jump, as well as Squirrel, had been moved to a makeshift hospital in Calian. It was later pointed out to us by locals, in 2004. I believe that it was Squirrel who told us that when they were there (and the units had left), a German officer came in, looked around, said nothing, and left.

**Henry Wikins** was in our group. I saw nothing of what happened to him, but he was found with a broken leg, and had been shot. He's buried in Draguignan. He was a Jewish refugee, who'd moved here just before the war, and signed up for the paratroops.

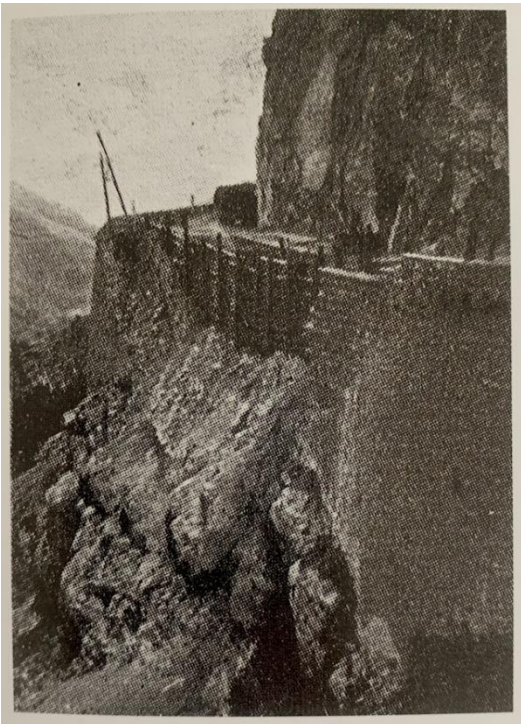


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The rest of the time in the south of France is a great number of disjointed missions. As engineers, we were parceled out for a task here, a task there. Among the more memorable ones were working on a blown-out road on the side of a hill. The Germans had blown out a whole road at a bend, and there were periods when shell fire would come down that way. One memorable experience there was that one of our Georgia people – might have been **Moses** or **Roberson** – had started to slide toward the edge, at a 45 degree angle. If he'd gone over, it was easily a hundred feet to the ground. How we got him up, I don't remember, whether it was by making a chain to drag him up or by throwing him a rope. I remember him saying, "Careful, boys."

One evening, the wounded were brought back and had to be carried across this 2-foot wide space, kind of a path – the only flat spot right next to the wall of the mountain. I remember one guy on a stretcher looking uneasy as we carried him across. I told him, "Don't worry – if you go, we're going with you." I don't know how much that might have helped him, but we got him across.



Men of the 1/596 Airborne Engineer repair the Col de Braus road.

Mid-September 1944



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In the evening of December 19, 1945, my father, **Kaare Allan Johnson**, returned home to relieved parents. They stayed up all night talking and listening to his war stories - the ones he could tell, anyway.

Days earlier, he'd arrived in New York Harbor on a troop ship, only a couple of miles from where my father had grown up on Staten Island. My father was home! He was so excited, running around the ship, telling anyone who would listen that "I live right over that hill!"

His fellow soldiers, though, were more interested in Lady Liberty.

The city, relatively dark through the war years, was lit - and so was the Statue of Liberty. Though Dad had grown up with her, for many men, this was their first meeting - and they'd been fighting for her all these years.

The cheers went up when she came into view - and then the personal conversations started. They were yelling for her, cheering for her, murmuring to her. "It's so good to see you." "Look what we did for you!" "And we'll do it again if we have to!"

Home for Christmas.

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It is with sadness that we learned of the passing of Allan Johnson on Tuesday in his 96th year.

Several of us have had the chance and honor to be around him repeatedly on the occasion of the commemorative jumps of Operation Dragoon en Provence.

Allan Johnson served in the Parachute Engineers, 517 Parachute Infantry Combat Team.

He participated in the campaigns of Italy, South France and the Battle of the Ardennes.

Another one of the many heroes of what Americans call the great generation, leaving to join St Michel and his angels.

Our thoughts accompany his family and friends.

Airborne Center

<https://www.facebook.com/Airborne-Center-232345210214448/>



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596th Airborne Engineer Company veteran Allan Johnson passed away tonight. He was known to many people here in Provence and Belgium. He had returned for the last time in August 2019 during the Provence landing commemorations and was a proud representative of his unit on the 517th PRCT.

Rest in peace Allan.

- **Loïc Jankowiak**



**Allan Johnson, Loïc Jankowiak and Leo Dean**



World War II veteran U.S. Army **Pfc. Kaare Allan Johnson** holds his New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal during an awards ceremony at his home in Hackettstown, N.J., April 22, 2020.

Johnson received the award from Dr. Mark A. Piferski, Deputy Commissioner for Veterans Affairs, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Johnson, a paratrooper with the 517th Parachute Combat Team, fought in Italy, France, Belgium, and Germany.

(New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Hackettstown, NJ



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Dearest Claire:

Rick, Alan and I were very saddened to read this news. Your dad was an outstanding president of the 5/17. He was so loved and he was so strong and vibrant until the end, projecting all the best of the men of 5/17 plus he was also so good looking with that great big smile of his that charmed and delighted everyone. What a great example of the 517th's incredible group of soldiers, patriots and heroes.

You and your Dad are in our hearts and prayers. May the good Lord surround you with divine love and shower you with so many wonderful warm memories of the incredible way that your Dad touched so many people. We loved him. He is at peace and has joined his mighty band of Brothers who have gone before him. Can only imagine the party on his arrival in heaven. Your dad was truly the Lord's good and faithful servant.

Love, **Pat, Alan and Rick Seitz**



K Allan Johnson and family in Sospel, France. August 11, 2014





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### MailCall News

Greetings!

I am the family historian for my family and have been researching my Grandfather **Robert Anderson's** war service. I found your site because of some Thunderbolt Newsletters he had saved over the years.



First, THANK YOU for your site - it is such a vast treasure of information. I have already ordered and read the Paratrooper's Odyssey and have several of the other books in my wish list.

Second, please keep this site going - there is so much information that I am just overwhelmed and have to take it bits at a time to process 😊

Lastly, it looks like you may need to update your roster. My grandfather passed away Nov 11, 2016. How fitting that it was veterans day!

Is there any information you would like from me to update your records other than what I've provided?

Thank you again and have a wonderful day!

Nicole Mauser-Storer

[n.mauserstorer@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:n.mauserstorer@huskers.unl.edu)

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From *Popular Mechanics*

## Let's Remember When French Paratroopers Once Used Bazooka Vespas in Combat

Yes, "scoot and shoot" was a short-lived military strategy in the 1950s.

From forceful fighter jets to tough-as-hell tanks, the world's militaries often use monster machines to flex their might. But intimidation comes in all sizes. And if we're going by the most perniciousness per pound, no tech tops the tiny military scooter French paratroopers briefly (and successfully) employed in the 1950s.

Seeking a modern version of a pack mule that could be dumped out of the back of a





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cargo aircraft behind enemy lines, France's post-World War II military equipped its airborne armies with a light, simple, and nimble vehicle that could descend into battle under a parachute.

Absurdly, the Vespa 150 TAP (Troupes Aéroportées; airborne troops) was based on the updated version of the goofy and gutless civilian Italian motor scooter seen in the 1952 movie *Roman Holiday*. The French vehicle company Ateliers de Construction de Motocycles et Automobiles (ACMA) built the scooters near Dijon from 1956 to 1959, fashioning around 600 for French military forces.

The world's fightingest motor scooter sported a beefed-up frame and lower gear ratios than the standard models. It bristled with equipment racks for lugging gear and wore a dull olive drab or sand-colored paint scheme in the place of flashy civilian colors like Metallizzato Grigio Azzurro. The bike was powered by a 145.5-cubic-centimeter, single-cylinder, two-stroke motor with a rotary valve design, which allowed a 2 percent oil mixture. Soldiers wryly said the 246-pound machine could attain speeds of about 40 miles per hour ... eventually.

The most striking feature of the mini war machine on 8-inch tires, however, was the American-made M20 75-millimeter recoilless rifle under the seat. Giving new meaning to the moniker "crotch rocket," the burly M20 wasn't exactly like the bazookas that preceded it. In fact, instead of firing a solid fuel-powered missile, the M20 belched out a 22-pound projectile moving at 1,000 feet per second with the help of a perforated artillery shell casing.

The unique thing about the high-powered weapon is that it was so light. By venting propellant gases out the rear, the 75mm had almost no recoil and no need for a weighty breech block, which meant it could be carried by a soldier—or, in this case, even an Italian motor scooter. The gun could fire smoke, high-explosive, and HEAT anti-tank rounds that were advertised as capable of punching through nearly 4 inches of armor at 7,000 yards.



Read the full article at: <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/a34823483/vespa-150-tap-french-combat-scooters-military-history/>



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## Administrivia

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- 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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