



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2465

February 28, 2021

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



From **Loïc Janlowiak**

Another super cool veteran has gone...

Bob Webber from Heavy Mortar Platoon 1/517 passed away in his sleep today.

He returned in 2016 to the ceremonies of the Provence landing. I'm going to miss our phone calls and his facebook comments...

This photo was taken during a beautiful day with **Adrien Soldi** during a jeep ride with him and his son Bruce. [That's Loïc J with Bob and Bruce in this picture, -- BB]



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Just wanted to let you know that my dad, **Ed Henzl**, died this week. He was a member of the 517, HQ Company, 1st Battalion. He trained at Toccoa, jumped in France as a member of the First Airborne Task Force, and fought with the unit in the battle of the Bulge. He remained with the unit until he was evacuated to a hospital on December 26, 1944, for trench foot and severe frostbite. He was not reunited with the 517 after his hospital stay but was sent to Germany to serve as a German interpreter and then to Marseille France to serve as a guard, before being discharged in December 1945. My Dad was proud of his service and the 517 PRCT. He and my mom attended a few of the 517 reunions, and several of the Kissimmee annual events.

Attached are a few photos and a news clipping.

Thank you. Best regards,
Karen Henzl Reece



greet.
better
I receive
changed so
just caught up with me.
I'm feeling fine. Just come back up front after a three-day rest. Today is D-73 so one of these days our outfit should be relieved.
Well, here's to an early end of the war and good luck to you all. Hoping to be back with you all soon.
EDDIE HENZL.
And thank you again for your kindness.
Fraternally yours,
MILADA BELOHLAVEK,
Recording Secretary





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I finally gave Loïc the information to contact my father [**Gabe Delesio** 460th PFAB] who said he would be happy to talk with Loic. Thanks for passing on the info. I had sent the Mail Call to my father through the mail several weeks ago and he has still not received it. Crazy times. I know that he will be excited to see himself on the cover. I have not told him that he will be in the issue. He wanted me to ask you if you know how many men are left from the 460th C Battery? I told him I would check with you. Hope you are well and thanks again.

Denise Delesio



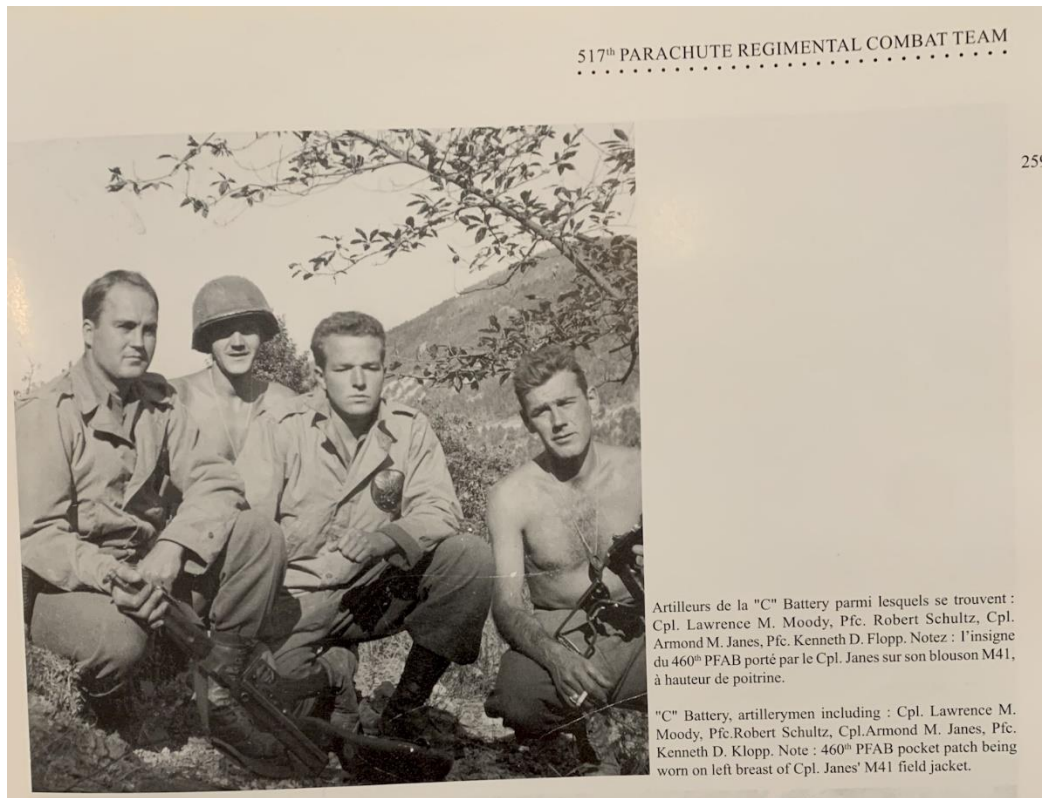
Hi Denise.

Regarding the remaining men of the 460-C, as far as I can tell, after the death of Merle McMorrow a few years ago, I think the Gabe is the last known member of the 460-C from my records. Since all the troopers would now be well into their 90's, this is probably not too surprising. But still sad every time I hear about another trooper making their last jump. It seemed these guys would last forever.

But as I always say, my records of the 517th are very incomplete, especially with regard to keeping track of 517th alumni. We never had a complete list as many drifted away after the war. Remember that the 517th unit was deactivated in 1946, and there was no active unit after that to maintain contact with the troopers. There were reunions, and the Thunderbolt and the 596th newsletter, but so many were separated from the unit at the end of the war or drifted off after that I don't think we ever had a roster for most of the troopers. My Dad, Ben Barrett, for example was wounded in 1945 and spent 6 months in a hospital in England. He only reconnected with the 517th when he read about a reunion sometime in the 80's.

Bob Barrett

Here are a few pics of Battery C troopers during Operation Dragoon, taken from **Michel De Trez's** book, *First Airborne Task Force*.





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Aérodrome de Montalto. Les hommes du Lt. Colonel Raymond L. Cato mirent deux jours pour préparer et emballer leurs Pack Howitzer de 75 mm. Les Howitzers avaient été conçus de telle manière qu'ils puissent être rapidement démontés et rangés dans une caisse pouvant être parachutée ou transportée à dos de mulet sur terrain difficile.

Montalto Airfield. Lt. Colonel Raymond L. Cato's artillerymen spent two days readying and packing their 75 mm Pack Howitzers crates loads. The howitzers were arranged for quick disassembly into loads for paracrate packing used for parachute delivery or for pack loads used over difficult terrain for transport by pack animals.



Le Cpl. Leonard F. Axtman et le Sgt. Harold W. Brereton, tous deux artilleurs de la "C" Battery.

Cpl. Leonard F. Axtman and Sgt. Harold W. Brereton, both artillerymen from "C" Battery.



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Au matin du Jour-J, des parachutistes de la "C" Battery, 460th PFAB et du 1st Battalion du 517th PIR halent un Pack Howitzer de 75mm sur la place des Arcs. Il fut très vite détruit durant une attaque allemande et brûla toute l'après-midi sur le pont de la gare du chemin de fer. L'avance rapide des forces de la 7^{ème} US Army ne permettait pas d'attribuer des véhicules à la First Allied Airborne Task Force, avec pour conséquence, que dans bien des cas, les parachutistes devaient tirer leurs 75 sur les nombreux kilomètres de terrain accidenté de la Riviera.

On the morning of D-Day, paratroopers of the "C" Battery, 460th PFAB and the 1st Battalion, 517th PIR haul a 75mm Pack Howitzer, from "C" Battery, through the village square of Les Arcs. This gun will very soon be set on fire during a German attack and will burn all afternoon on the bridge of the railroad station. The fluid and rapid advance of Seventh US Army forces made it difficult to allocate any vehicles to the First Allied Airborne Task Force, meaning that in many cases, paratroopers had to haul their 75s for many miles over the rugged Riviera terrain.



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I did search for 2 members of 460-C who used to be on the T'Bolt roster and used to attend reunions. Unfortunately, both did pass away a few years ago.



Henry "Hank" John Schneider passed away at home on June 29, 2016 in Birmingham, Michigan. Henry was born September 17, 1917 in Detroit, MI to David and Elizabeth (Widiker) Schneider. He was a longtime resident of Sterling Heights, MI. He retired as a toolmaker from the automotive industry in 1982. He served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. He received a battlefield commission and was promoted to 2nd lieutenant of the 82nd Airborne Division. He will be remembered as a hardworking, loving gentleman of the highest integrity and always in search of that perfect bowling game. Henry is survived by his wife of 21 years, Nancy Keihn. He was preceded in death by his first wife Rita (Geary) and their daughter Joyce Danner (Schneider). Brothers: David and John Schneider. Sisters: Marie and Betty. Half Brothers: John and Bill. Half Sisters: Wilma and Dorothy. He will be missed by many extended family.



Glen W. Mitchell Born 9-21-1924, passed on 12-5-2011. Glen served in the military for 4 years, all during WWII as a paratrooper. Glen fought in Germany and France. Was a part of the 82nd airborne and was part of the only successful jump behind enemy lines in occupied France. Glenn also fought in the Battle of the Bulge. After serving his country, Glen returned to Colorado where he met his future wife, Carol, had a family and eventually moved to Santa Maria, California in 1959. Glen started his own plastering company and thrived with it for over 25 years. Glen retired from plastering in 1986 and moved to Bullhead City, Arizona. Glen kept himself busy after his retirement with frequent trips to the casinos in Laughlin, Nevada, where he loved to play Video Poker. Glen was preceded in death by his wife, Carolyn and his brother, Melbourne. Glen is survived by his son and spouse, Russell

and Wanda, by his grandson and spouse, Brandon and Becky, his great grandchildren, Joshua and Nathan, his nephew and spouse, Gary and Helen Mitchell, along with several cousins. Glen is also survived by several nieces and nephews from his wife's side of the family, which he loved as much as if they were his own blood.



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I am attaching a news article I found about my dad's experiences earning him a bronze star. I would also like to note that he was not a US citizen at the time but felt it was his duty to fight. It is a bit challenging to read but worth the effort. He never talked about this when he was alive. Please put it on the 517th website with his other information as well.

Regards,

Christine Bunce

Daughter of **Ray Bunce**, F Company

Thank you Bob, another fantastic edition of the 517th News !! Great articles, especially about the Jump into the South of France. This article brought a lump to my throat, because one of my Special Forces CO's was **Gene Frice**. Col, at that time, Private Frice, was a Pathfinder on that historic jump. This story brought back many fond memories of my Dear friend, and Mentor, Col Frice.

On the parachute article, and picture, in my humble opinion, the picture is not of a German Paratrooper, If I am not mistaken, the German Rig was connected to the main canopy by a single ring attachment. Because of this, the parachute was not steerable, they had to flail their arms and legs in order to achieve movement. I'm sure this type of setup made it one hell of a ride, and a very hard landing!! On the subject of Special Forces Freefall Helmets, the picture shown is not of a German helmet, it is the standard issue for freefall jumping.

Side note: In Military Freefalls, you have two (2) Types:

1. HAHO - High Altitude, High Opening
2. HALO - High Altitude, Low Opening

Best regards.

J.R. "Ray" Estrella - (Son-In-Law of **Bert Duran** - A Co.)

LOCAL SOLDIER HONORED FOR ROUTING NAZI GROUP

BRONZE STAR AWARDED S/SGT. RAYMOND E. BUNCE WHO KILLED TWO MEMBERS OF MACHINE-GUN CREW

Credited with routing a German detachment early this year in Belgium, S/Sgt. Raymond E. Bunce, a member of the 517th Parachute Infantry, and son of Mrs. Priscilla Bunce, 427 East Market Street, has been awarded the Bronze Star for heroic achievement near St. Vith.



The citation recently received by Mrs. Bunce reads in part as follows: "While leading a reconnaissance patrol, Sergeant Bunce detected a German ambush of approximately thirty riflemen and one machine gun. Although outnumbered 5 to 1, he moved aggressively forward, signaling his patrol to follow. With a few well-placed bursts from his submachine gun, Sergeant Bunce killed two members of the machine-gun crew and wounded the other."

"Discovering that his weapon had jammed," the citation goes on, "Sergeant Bunce promptly dashed to the enemy weapon and placed it in action. His devastating fire killed and wounded fifteen more of the enemy and forced the remainder to flee. Sergeant Bunce's daring and devotion to duty reflect great credit on himself and the military service," the award concludes.

The Scranton soldier entered service in April, 1943, and received training at Camp Tocco, N. C.; Camp Marshall, N. C., and Fort Benning, Ga., before going overseas in April, 1944. He saw considerable action in the various campaigns and was wounded on June 25, 1944, in Italy and again on Oct. 10, 1944, in France. He holds the Purple Heart and two Oak Leaf Clusters. A graduate of North Scranton Junior High School, Sergeant Bunce joined the colors while a student at Central High School.



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RE: Paratrooper jump image

Wow! Thanks Bob.

I just assumed it was a photo copyrighted by the association.

I looked at your links and see the same that you do.

I think I'll have my designer draw a composite of a WWII paratrooper jumping out of a C47, based on a variety of photos or other drawings, or I might use the German pic as a model. I also want to show the cup-shaped chin strap as that was invented by members of the 517th for their jump in southern France.

I'll ask George Rumsey if he has any photos as well. He did send me a small group from his collection.

Appreciate your quick turnaround here.

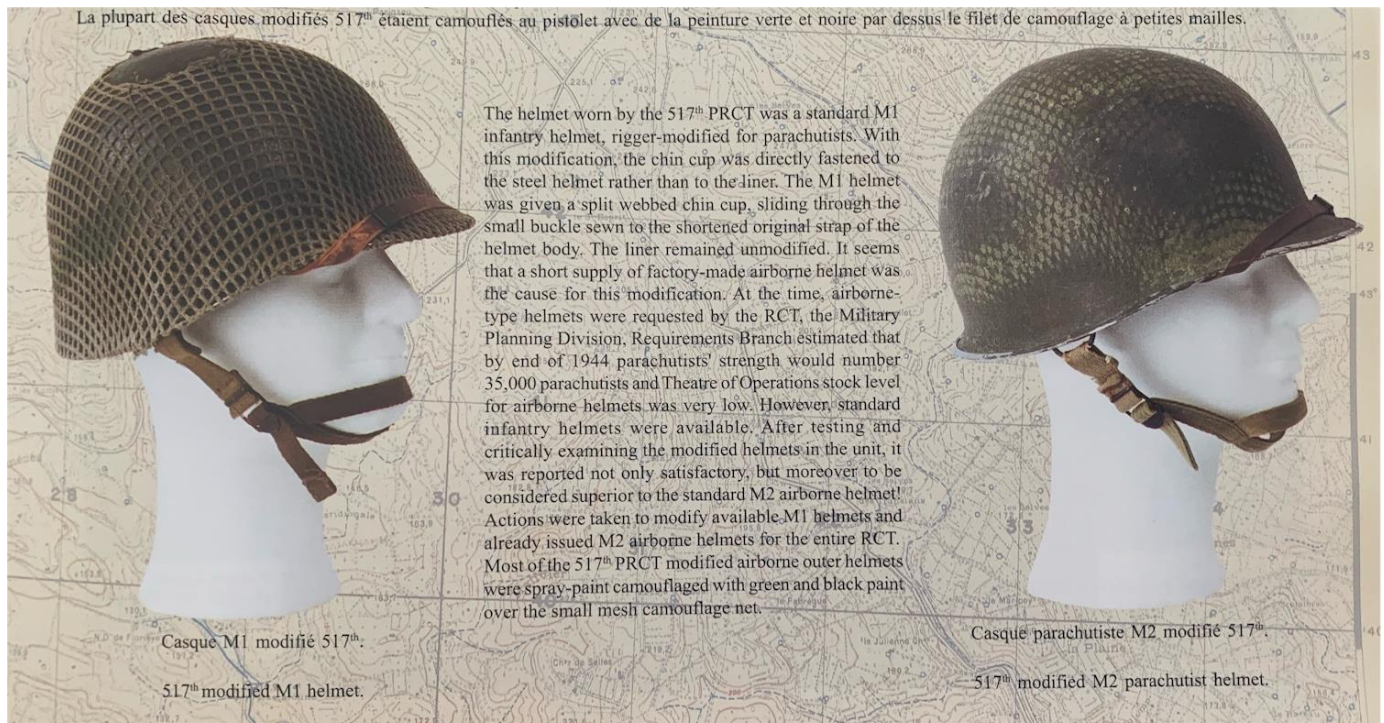
Best,

Robert Lofthouse | | Author of *Hold the Line*

Hi Rob, How'd you know about the custom chin-straps? You may already know this, but the chin strap is important enough to current re-enactors, that it is described on the 517th Wikipedia page: [Helmets](#)

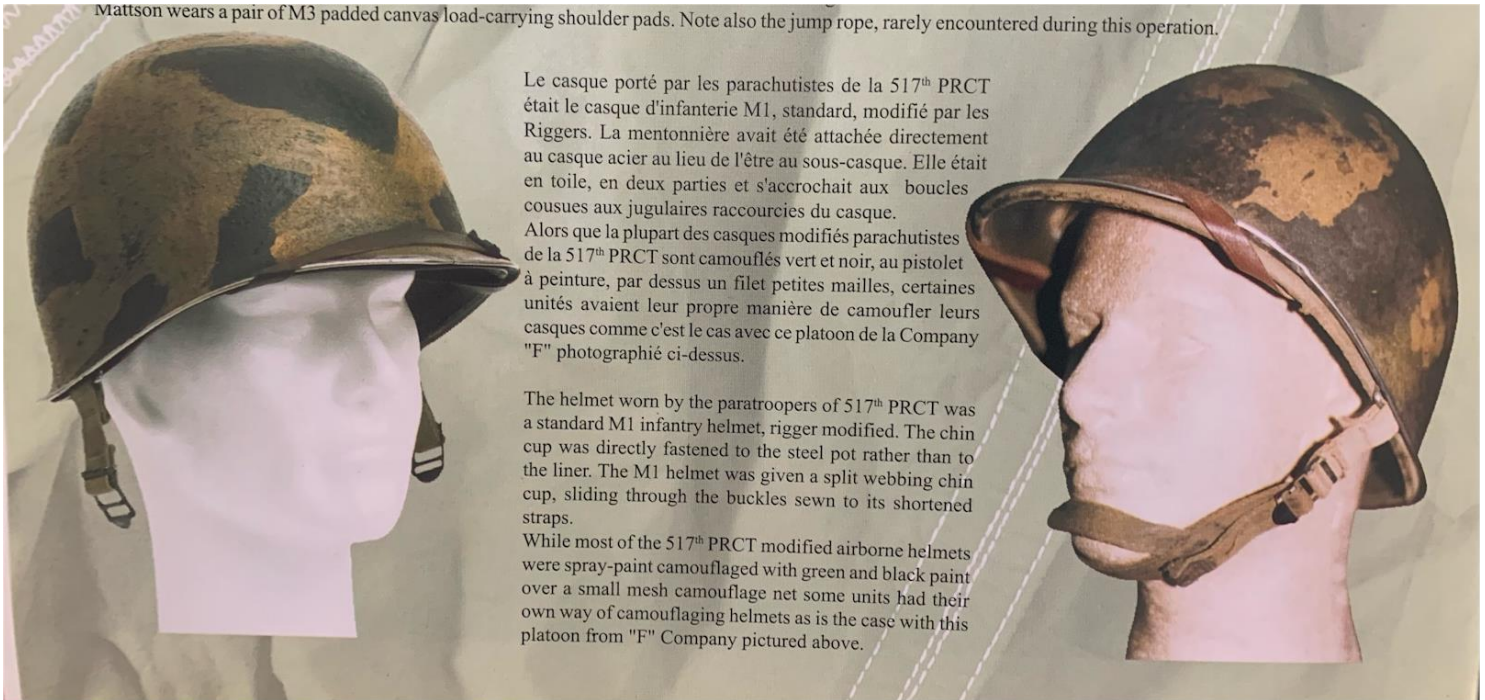
I have attached two entries about the chin-straps from the *First Airborne Task Force* book by **Michel De Trez**.

Bob Barrett





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Hope you are healthy and have been surviving the pandemic. We feel for you during your winters under these conditions. Thank you for keeping the history of the 517th so vibrant.

This very interesting Mail Call was a great read and has triggered questions. Would you refresh my memory about **Doc Plassman** and if you can give some background that would be most appreciated?

I was intrigued with the piece you did on "Kilroy Was Here" on the WWII Memorial as well as its background of when and how it started. I learned something new.

I'm impressed that you uncovered the "2 hour game" about the 517th's southern invasion. While I don't know the military history like you and my husband **Alan Greer**, it read well to me and gave a greater understanding of all the moving parts in the southern invasion.

I was so happy to see a comment from **Wayne Cross** and appreciated his sharing his Dad's description of **Capt. Starkey**. Glad Wayne is like you keeping the 517th's history fresh for the next generation.

May your 2021 be better in every way than 2020. Hope you and everyone else who is eligible has had their vaccine. Alan had his first vaccine but six days later was exposed. While he became a very sick puppy, the doctors said the fact that he had the first dose kept him out of the hospital and helped to speed his recovery. Because they gave him an antibody infusion to contribute to his speedy recovery, he must wait until April to have his 2nd vaccine. The bottom line — when it is offered to you, please get the vaccine, and then remain careful until you get the second (if you are doing a two dose vaccine) and have reached full immunity.

Pat Seitz



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From a few sources, here is a little about **Walter Plassman**: He was the son of a doctor from Illinois. He attended University of Chicago Medical School and enlisted in 1943, assigned to the Carlisle PA barracks. Plassman and his good friend **James McNamara** volunteered for the paratroopers, went to Fort Benning, then both joined the 517th in February 1944. After the war, Plassman set up his general practice in rural Illinois. "Some very interesting home deliveries by lantern light, etc." In 1964, he stopped private practice and worked at a state facility for the developmentally disabled, where he became clinical director, eventually retiring in 1984. He passed away in 2007.

Here is a story about **Doc Plassman** in Montauroux, from **Jean-Loup Gassend's** *Operation Dragoon – Autopsy of a Battle* :

Surprising as it may seem, infirmaries had been set up in Callian, Montauroux, and Fayence, where wounded from all sides were treated. **Udo Taubmann**, the German soldier who had been wounded one night while standing guard, was probably brought to one of these improvised hospitals. In Montauroux, **Captain Walter Plassman**, a doctor from the Medical Detachment of the 517th PIR was in charge, and even the Germans let him take care of the wounded without bothering him, as he later explained:

We landed far from our objective, and those who could walk left to join the main forces. About six men in myself were unable to do more than hobble. One man had a fractured leg. My left knee had banged against a rock wall next to a road. With the help of two civilians, we managed to reach Montauroux which was about one kilometer off.

I set up a casualty station in a building that had been a TB sanatorium. There were only three cots there, but people brought in mattress. While I was there, I met a French dentist who happened to be visiting his in-laws. He was great. He managed to scrounge food and water for us. Another very helpful person was the local priest.

Things were quiet, except for a few artillery rounds that felt quite close. That night around 1:00 A.M., about twenty-five German soldiers came into the town. They had one old truck and they were part of an engineer company. Their captain spoke some English. He said we should stay put and later they would try to evacuate us to their hospital. The Germans remained all day. They had one wounded man with them, a gut shot. I examined him, but explained I could do nothing except give him morphine. He died a few hours later. That night around 2:00 A.M., they pulled out taking their dead man.

And a few more details from a French villager:

Raymond Carbonel saw this severely wounded German being brought to **Captain Walter Plassman's** infirmary in Montauroux:

That afternoon, I had the first vision of the war in all its horror in front of my eyes for the first time. A cart pushed by three or four armed FFI men passed by our door. A young blonde German soldier was sitting on it, his hands clenched to the guardrails. He must have



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been about the same age is myself. He was swaying his head right and left, like a metronome, with blood dribbling off at every more movement. He had no more face: his mouth, his nose, his eyes were nothing but red and bloody mush. Apparently, grenade fragments had blown off his face.

He was brought to the Prieuré [infirmary], and a few years later I found out he had been filled with morphine and that he had died during the night. It is my most atrocious memory of that period.

Here are a few photos of Doc Plassman sent in by **J. Mickael Soldi** and **Eric Renoux**.

In Nice, 1944



Reunion in Columbus GA in 1999



Michael, Dr. Plassman, Eric

Dr. Plassman and Michael





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Administrivia

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- 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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