

1975 REUNION



517

PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM

August 14, 15, 16, 1975

Fort Bragg, North Carolina
'HOME OF THE AIRBORNE'

"STARS FELL ON THE 517."

Major General Richard J. Seitz, from a speech at the New Orleans reunion, August 1973.

The stars fell on the following men of the 517 PIR who epitomized in war and peace those qualities which led to the remarkable careers depicted here.

The 'first love' of the general officers shown here was with the 517. It was and still is a bittersweet, fierce love which has burned brightly for thirty odd years. Affection, respect, pride and the sharing of danger during the savagery of combat in Italy, France, Belgium and Germany cemented this life-long sentiment.

Included in this illustrious group are Lt. Terry Sanford, Colonel Rupert D. Graves and Pfc. Melvin Biddle for their singular contributions to the history of the 517.

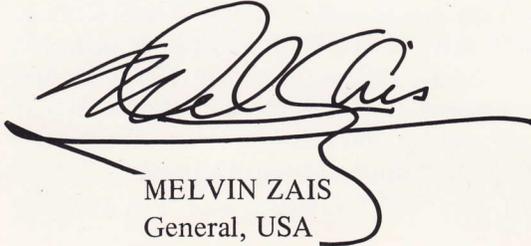
HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED LAND FORCES SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE
IZMIR • TURKEY
Office of the Commander

14 March 1975

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE 517th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
AND THEIR FAMILIES

As I write this greeting on a beautiful March day in far away Turkey, I cannot help but reflect on the fact that it was exactly thirty-two years ago that I reported to Camp Toccoa, Georgia to activate the Third Battalion. Since then I have had the good fortune to command hundreds of thousands of outstanding soldiers. As I reflect in my mind's eye on the galaxy of men and units with whom I have served, I always return to that gallant, hell-raising, heroic band of troopers that gathered together in Camp Toccoa and Fort Benning to form the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

Even now there hangs on my office wall a photograph of the Third Battalion assembled on the parade ground at Camp Mackall, North Carolina; and I look at the faces with poignant nostalgia. Many gave their lives, and I knew them all. My son is named after that incredibly brave and fine man, Captain Joseph McGeever. I still see him and so many others in that picture as they lay on the battlefield; and I am haunted by the obligation to serve in such a manner that their sacrifice shall not have been in vain. I can state categorically after all these years of service that there was never a finer or more gallant unit assembled than the 517th Parachute Combat Team, including the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the 596th Parachute Engineer Company. I have been branded by their memory, and I greet all of you here today at our reunion with deepest respect, affection and gratitude.



MELVIN ZAÏS
General, USA
Commanding

GENERAL MELVIN ZAIS, UNITED STATES ARMY



General Melvin Zais, a native of Massachusetts, began his military career as a United States Army Reserve Second Lieutenant following his graduation from the University of New Hampshire in 1937.

Upon completion of his initial tour of active duty, he served as a Professor of Military Tactics at Tennessee Military Institute. In 1940, he was recalled to active duty and served at Fort Benning, Georgia where he volunteered for the original paratroop battalion in the Army, the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion.

After graduation from the Command and General Staff College in 1943, General Zais organized and trained the 3d Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment and led them into combat in Italy and France. Service as Regimental Executive Officer during combat in Belgium and Germany was followed by command of the Regiment upon its return to Fort Bragg.

Command and troop duty, high level staff assignments and schooling characterized General Zais' post-war service. Division level staff duties, attendance at the Regular Command and General Staff College course, advisory duty with a Turkish Brigade in Korea and Chief of Staff, 101st Airborne Division and Commanding Officer, 187th Airborne Infantry Battle Group were among his duty assignments. After completing the Regular Command and General Staff College course in July 1949, General Zais was asked to

join the faculty of the Command and General Staff College, where he remained until September 1952.

General Zais' staff assignments include duty with the Headquarters Department of the Army, US Seventh Army in Germany and United States Strike Command until his selection as Brigadier General on 1 June 1964.

After a tour as Director and Deputy Director of Enlisted Personnel, Office of Personnel Operations, Department of the Army 1964-1966, he became, successively, Deputy Commanding General, I Field Force and Assistant Division Commander of the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam. From July 1966 until July 1968, he was Director of Individual Training in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army. He served his second tour in Vietnam as Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division and Commanding General, XXIV Corps during the period July 1968-June 1970. Following assignment as Director for Operations (J-3), Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff from August 1970 until June 1972, General Zais assumed command of the Third United States Army at Fort McPherson, Georgia in June 1972 which position he held until June 1973. Promoted to General on 13 July 1973, General Zais was named Commanding General, Allied Land Forces, Southeast Europe, Turkey, effective August 1973. In 1974 General Zais was named the 27th Kermit Roosevelt Lecturer by the Department of the Army.

General Zais is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College, the National War College and the Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program. He has been awarded an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of New Hampshire. His military decorations include the award of the Distinguished Service Medal on four occasions; the Silver Star twice; the Legion of Merit four times; the Distinguished Flying Cross twice; the Bronze Star Medal; the Joint Service Commendation Medal; the Army Commendation Medal twice; the Purple Heart; and numerous foreign awards and honors.

PUBLICATIONS

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|-----------|--|
| June 1949 | <i>Monograph at C&GSC, Ft Leavenworth, KA</i> "Developments in Ground Warfare from 1939 to 1949 and Future Potentialities" |
| June 1953 | <i>US Army Combat Forces Journal</i> "New Tactics for the New Gear" |
| Jan 1962 | <i>Army Magazine</i> "Combat Readiness is the Mission" |
| Mar 1969 | <i>Army Digest</i> "Wanted: Skilled NCOs" |
| May 1968 | <i>Army Magazine</i> "The New NCO" |
| Jul 1968 | <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Science</i> "The Physical and Moral Stamina of American Youth" |

LIEUTENANT GENERAL RICHARD J. SEITZ



Richard Joe Seitz was born in Leavenworth, Kansas on 18 February 1918. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Infantry (USAR) from Kansas State College ROTC in 1939. He holds a Bachelor of General Education Degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

He assumed command of XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg on 1 July 1973. Immediately prior to that he served for three years as the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel at Department of the Army Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

He was called to active duty in February 1940, and in 1941 was among the early graduates of the Parachutist Course at Fort Benning, Ga. In March 1943 he joined the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment at Camp Mackall, N. C., and later served with that unit through campaigns in Italy, France, Belgium and Germany. When the war ended he returned with the 517th to Fort Bragg, N. C.

Since World War II he has served overseas in Japan, Brazil, Iran and Vietnam. In 1947-49 he was with the 11th Airborne Division in Hokkaido, Japan. He has served twice in Brazil—in 1954-57 with the Joint Brazil-U. S. Military Commission in Rio de Janeiro and in 1968-70 as Chairman, U. S. Military Delegation/Chief, U. S. Military Group. He spent a year (1960-61) with the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Iran as a Team Chief in Western Azerbaijan. From June 1965 to March 1967 he served in the

Republic of Vietnam. First he was Deputy Commanding General, U. S. Army Support Command, then Assistant Deputy Commanding General and Chief of Staff, U. S. Army Vietnam.

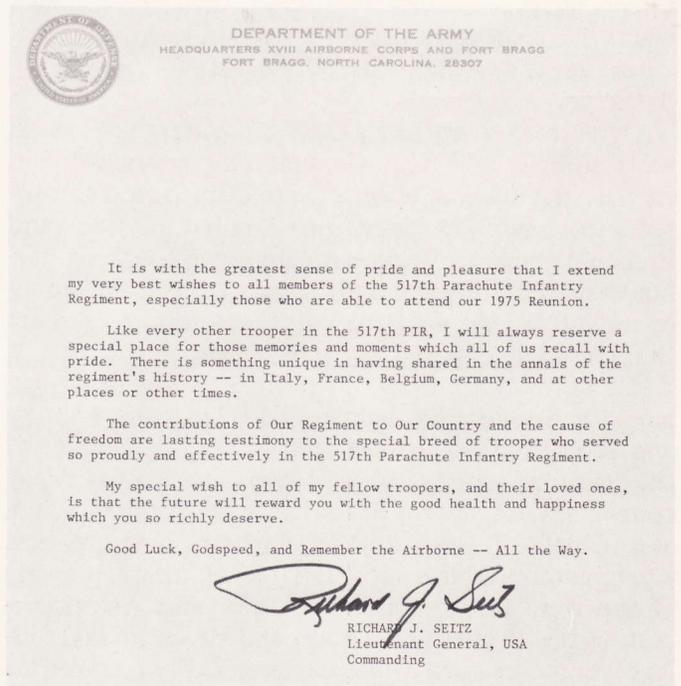
Later assignments at Fort Bragg have included from July 1958 to February 1960, first as Commanding Officer, 2d Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry, 82d Airborne Division and then as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3 (Operations and Training), XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg. He returned in April 1967 as Commanding General, 82d Airborne Division until October 1968.

He also served in the Pentagon with the Office of the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and the Office of Personnel Operations in 1962-65.

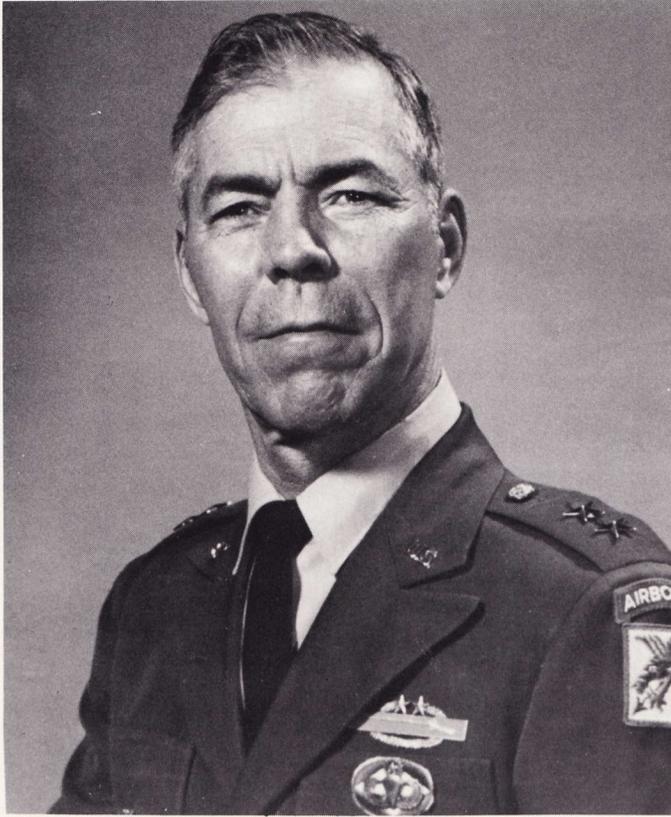
His military education includes attendance at the Command and General Staff College, the Armed Forces Staff College, the Army Language School and the Sanz School of Languages. He also has completed the Parachutist, Riggers and Glider Courses, and the Infantry Officers Advanced Course.

The master parachutist's decorations include two Distinguished Service Medals, the Silver Star, two Legions of Merit, two Bronze Star Medals, the Air Medal, and the Purple Heart. Foreign awards include the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, the Korean Order of Military Merit, the National Order of Vietnam 5th Class, and the Brazilian Deque de Caxiz — Order of the Pacificodos.

The general is a member of Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity and the Scabbard and Blade. He is keenly interested in sports as a morale and health builder. His wife is the former Bettie Jean Merrill of Ellis, Kansas. They have four children.



MAJOR GENERAL SIDNEY MICHAEL MARKS



Warmest greetings to my fellow troopers of the 517th Parachute Combat Team and their families at this joyous reunion.

My first military assignment as a rifle platoon leader in C Company, 1st Battalion will always be treasured as probably the highlight of my military career. It was my first love and my deepest love.

The same comrades who fought so splendidly throughout Europe have fought nobly by their example since in building a better America for us all.

Major General Sidney 'Mickey' Marks

General "Mickey" Marks was born in Keota, OK, on 8 Jan '19, and graduated from Ponca City High School in '38. He attended Oklahoma A and M College for three and one-half years, until the outbreak of World War II interrupted his education. On 17 Dec '42, General Marks graduated from Infantry Officer Candidate School at Ft Benning, GA, and was commissioned a second lieutenant of Infantry. He remained at Ft Benning to attend the Parachute School.

His initial assignment was as a rifle platoon leader with C Company, 1st Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment Combat Team at Camp MacKall, NC. He remained with C Company throughout World War II, fighting in the European Theater in the Rome-Arno, Southern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe campaigns as a platoon leader, company executive officer, and company commander.

He returned in Aug '45, with the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment to Ft Bragg, NC, as commander, C Company.

On 2 Jul '50, he deployed with the first regimental-size unit committed to combat in Korea, serving subsequently as company commander and regimental S-3 of the 34th Infantry. While in Korea, he fought in the UN Defensive, the UN Offensive, the CCF Intervention, the 1st UN Counter Offensive, the CCF Spring Offensive, and the UN Summer-Fall Offensive campaigns.

In Sep '53, he attended the Command and General Staff College, Ft Leavenworth, KS. Upon graduation, he was assigned to the Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, as an instructor in the Air Command and Staff College. In the summer of '57, he received a B.S. degree from Oklahoma State University and graduated in Jan '58 from Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, VA.

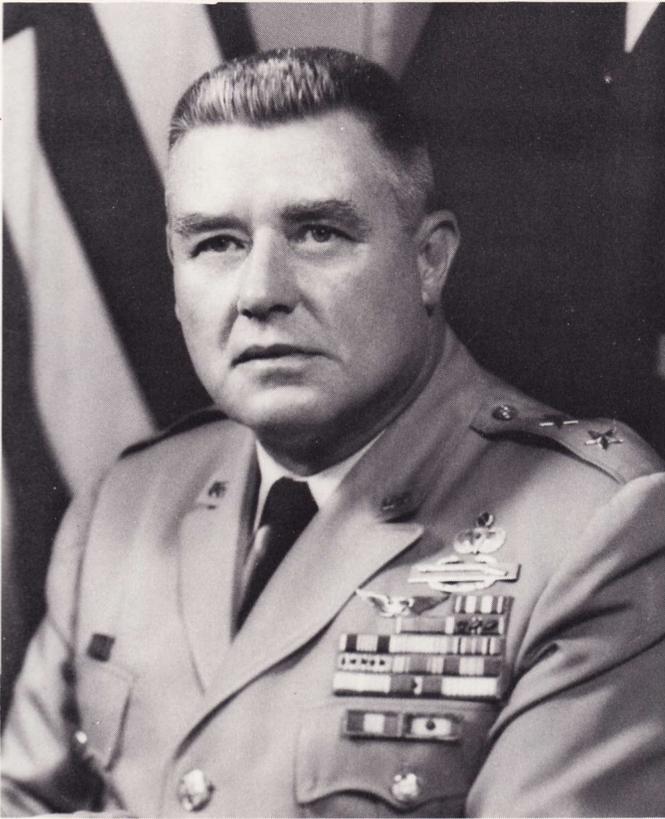
In Dec '60, General Marks returned to command the 1st Airborne Battle Group, 504th Infantry "Devils in Baggy Pants." He remained in this position until Jun '62 when he attended the U. S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

In Jul '66, General Marks reported for duty in Vietnam where he served for one year as Commander of the 3d "Iron" Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, fighting principally in the Third Corps, Tactical Zone.

In Feb '71, General Marks assumed the position of Chief of Staff, First U. S. Army, Fort Meade, MD. In Sep '73 he arrived in Alaska to command the U. S. Army, Alaska, returning to Ft Bragg, NC, in Jan '75 for assignment as Deputy Commanding General of XVIII Airborne Corps.

His citations and decorations include the following: Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, Legion of Merit w/5 OLC, Distinguished Flying Cross, Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star Medal with Valor device and 5 OLC, Air Medal w/V and 26 OLC, Army Commendation Medal w/OLC, Air Force Commendation Medal, Purple Heart, American Campaign Medal, EAME Campaign Medal w/arrowhead and 5 campaign stars, World War II Victory Medal, Army of Occupation Medal (Japan), National Defense Service Medal w/OLC, Korean Service Medal w/6 campaign stars, Vietnam Campaign Medal w/2 campaign stars, Distinguished Unit Citation w/cluster, National Order of Vietnam, Fifth Class (Vietnam), Gallantry Cross w/3 Palms (Vietnam), Gallantry Cross w/Silver Star (Vietnam), Armed Forces Honor Medal First Class (Vietnam), Vietnam Service Medal (Vietnam), French Fourragere, Belgian Fourragere, Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation, United Nations Service Medal (Korea), Gallantry Cross w/Palms (Vietnam Unit Citation), Combat Infantryman's Badge with Two Stars, Master Parachutist Badge, General Staff Identification Badge.

MAJOR GENERAL LOU WALSH, JR.



Dear Troopers of the 517th:

First, I feel honored to have been asked to send a picture and biographical data.

I was, as perhaps some may remember, the first CO of the 517th. In many ways, it was and remains, my "first love." However, since I was not privileged to command the regiment in combat, my bibliography is of little consequence.

After activating the 517th and bringing it through the Tennessee maneuvers, we got our Port Call and then our paths separated. I joined the 11th Airborne Division, jumped on Luzon with the 511 PIR which I later commanded. I was chief of the US Army Mission to Columbia, our great ally in Korea. After attending the Staff College I was given command of the re-activated 503 PIR. After attending the National War College, I served a tour with NATO and after selection as a General Officer I served as Ass't. Commandant of the Infantry School, with the Airborne Department as a part of my command. From there back to Korea. I became a rated Army aviator and then retired for physical disability after 36 years of service and in the grade of Major General. Now I enjoy my family and retirement.

I direct your attention to the snap shot taken at Camp Toccoa, Ga. in 1943 and represents a typical 517 Commanders' Conference. In the background is the Mock Tower. On the left is Lt. Bob Pierce, now a rancher and race horse owner in Panama; next is Lt. Col. George R. (Ike) Walton, beloved by all then, as now. Ike was hurt on the jump into Southern France

and eventually retired. Beyond Ike is Major Bill Boyle who was really tough and made his second combat parachute jump as a Colonel in Korea! In front of "Wild Bill" is Major Dick Seitz, commanding the 2nd Bn. On the extreme right is Major Mel Zais, commanding the 3rd Bn. and myself.

Did you know that:

That when activated on 15 March 1943, the aggregate strength of the 517th PIR was 11... all officers?

The first fillers arrived at Camp Toccoa for 'consideration' of assignment to the 517 BEFORE the enlisted cadre reported for duty... and the officers cooked and served their first meal!

The 517th was the first parachute unit to use a Mock-Up tower as a 'test of intention' prior to acceptance for assignment?

As a direct result of this, the 517th was the first (and only) unit to have entire battalions go through jump training without a jump refusal. Of course, another direct result was that it took 'forever and a day' to fill up the regiment. I was reprimanded and the 3rd Bn had to fill up at Benning.

The 517 was the first unit to use the steel helmet during jump training... and thereafter, all used them.

The Regiment was made up of pretty young fellows... at one point when the officer strength was 55, Ike Walton, who is a West Point classmate of mine and I had, together, more years of service (18) than all the rest of the officers.

The 517 was the first Parachute Regimental Combat Team to be so designated...

I hope to see all of you at the Reunion!

Sincerely,



MAJOR GENERAL JOHN HENRY NEILER



Greetings – Comrades of the 517th PCT!

I'm looking forward to the opportunity to see you all again, to thank each of you for the contribution our association in the 517th – 460th – 596th Parachute Combat Team made to my personal development. The lessons in leadership and organizational management which we all learned from General Walsh and Colonel Graves, and applied as team members, have been invaluable to me in both Army Reserve and business activities.

See you in August—

ASSIGNMENT: Mobilization Designation as Assistant to the Chief of Research and Development, Department of Army, Washington, D.C., 20310.

HOME ADDRESS: 853 West Outer Drive, Oak Ridge, Tenn. 37830.

BORN: Mount Oliver, Pa., 21 Dec 1922.

CIVILIAN EDUCATION: University of Pittsburgh, B.S., 1947, M.S., 1950, and Ph.D., 1953.

CIVILIAN OCCUPATION: Director of Technical Planning, EG&G, Inc., and Vice President, Oak Ridge Technical Enterprises Corp., Oak Ridge, Tenn.

MILITARY HISTORY

General Neiler was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, Infantry, in 1943 through the Citizens Military Training Camp Program. During World War II, he served as Platoon Leader, Company Executive Officer, and Battalion and Regimental S2 with the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the United States and the European Theater of Operations; and Battalion and Regimental S2 with the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was released from active duty in May 1946.

In U.S. Army Reserve status, General Neiler has served as an Instructor in the 3143d U.S. Army Reserve School, and as a Mobilization Designee to the Office of Special Weapons, U.S. Continental Army Command; and to the Nuclear Defense Laboratory, Army Material Command. He entered his present assignment in December 1971, and his promotion to Brigadier General was effective 4 August 1972. He was promoted to Major General effective 12 February 1975.

MILITARY EDUCATION

Infantry School, Refresher, 1943, Parachute School, 1943; Radiological Training Officer Course, U.S. Navy Damage Control School, 1947; Command and General Staff College, Special Associate Course, 1952; Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Economics of National Security, 1964.

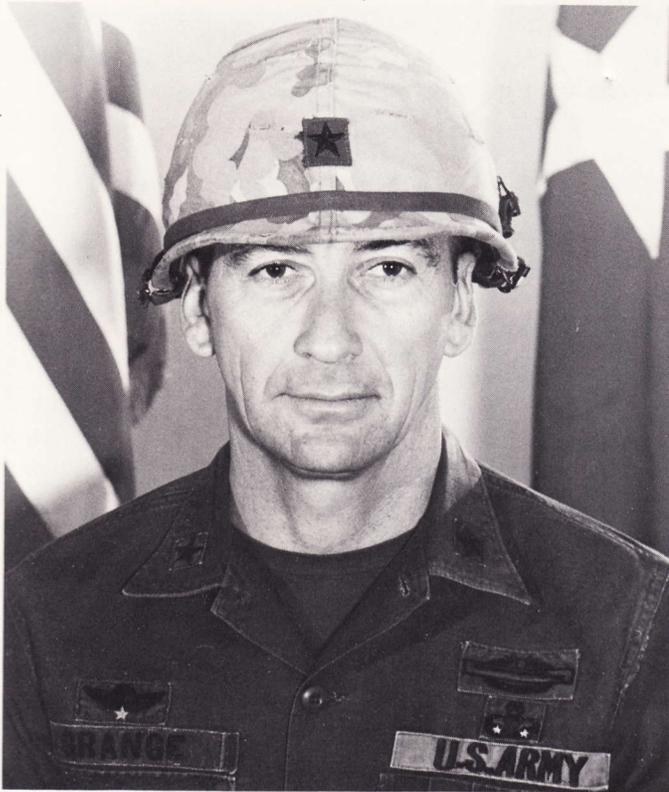
MILITARY DECORATIONS

Silver Star; Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device; Purple Heart Medal; Combat Infantryman's Badge; Parachute Badge.

Prior to 1962 – Physicist and Group Leader, Oak Ridge Nat'l Laboratory, involved in a variety of basic research studies in nuclear physics. Seven years involvement with civilians, including Eugene Wigner and Edward Teller, attempting to expand the U.S. awareness of the need for passive (fallout and blast shelter) Civil Defense as a necessary adjunct of our active and deterrent defense systems. Concurrently, Instructor in Physics, University of Tennessee.

General Neiler is one of the foremost authorities on nuclear physics and related areas and has published dozens of works in these fields.

BRIGADIER GENERAL DAVID E. GRANGE, JR.



Greetings to my Airborne Buddies:

Lois and I have looked forward to this 30th anniversary of the drop into Southern France. It will be so wonderful to be with the great troopers that made the 517th such a unique fighting outfit. Incidentally, in over 32 years of serving in numerous outfits, airborne and "straight-leg", I have never served with braver, more dedicated men.

I guess my most vivid memory of the 517th goes back to Camp Toccoa. The officers are still a great source of pride to me. They did everything they asked the troopers to do — and then some! As a young (18-year-old) private I was most impressed. I have tried to emulate their leadership techniques throughout my own career. I can still see Major Seitz and Captain Cross leading us up that dusty trail, doubletime, to the top of Mt. Currahee!

See you at Bragg. Airborne!

Fondly,

Brigadier General Grange joined the Army in June 1943 and served as a Parachute Infantryman in Europe. He took part in the Rome-Arno, Southern France, Rhineland, Ardennes, and Central Europe campaigns.

Brigadier General Grange attended the Army's Officer Candidate School in 1949-50. He was commissioned a second lieutenant of Infantry on 19 May 1950.

In Korea, 1950-51, he served as a rifle platoon leader in the 187th Airborne Regiment. Later, on a second Korean tour, 1952-53, he commanded a rifle company in the 17th Infantry Regiment.

Upon return from Korea in 1953, he was a Ranger instructor at the Army's Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1955 he attended the Infantry Officer Advanced Course and upon completion in 1956 volunteered for Special Forces duty. General Grange served with Special Forces at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, until 1957 when he was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group in Germany. After three years in Europe with the "Green Berets", he returned to the United States to attend the 1960-61 Regular Course at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Following graduation in June 1961, he was assigned to the Pentagon for duty on the Army General Staff.

In 1963, General Grange was ordered to Vietnam as a member of the Department of Defense's Research and Development Field Unit, Vietnam as an Airborne/Ranger/Infantry advisor. He returned in 1964 to an assignment with the US Army Combat Development Command. General Grange served as the Army Liaison Officer to the US Air Force at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, during this assignment.

In 1966 he was moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to become the Assistant Chief of Staff G-1 of the 82d Airborne Division. When the 101st Airborne Division was alerted for movement to Vietnam in 1967. General Grange was selected to command one of the Airborne Infantry battalions. He moved to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in August 1967 and took his battalion to Vietnam on 2 December 1967. General Grange returned to the United States and a Fort Knox assignment in December 1968 where he served as Director of the Allied Officer Training Department at the Armor School. Following this assignment, General Grange returned to Vietnam where he served with the 101st Airborne Division, consecutively commanding the Division Support Command and the 3d Brigade.

His last duty prior to his assignment here was Director, Ranger Department, United States Army Infantry School from July 1971 until September 1973, at Fort Benning, Georgia.

General Grange has completed the Advanced Infantry Officer Course; the Command and General Staff College Course; the Army War College; the Parachute, Ranger and Special Forces Officer Courses; the Strategic Intelligence School; and the Russian Language Course. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Nebraska, and the Advanced Management Course of the University of Pittsburgh.

General Grange has been awarded the following decorations: Silver Star w/2 OLC, the Legion of Merit w/OLC, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Soldier's Medal, the Air Medal w/V and 27 device, the Bronze Star w/V and 4OLC, the Joint Services Commendation Medal w/V, the Army Commendation Medal w/V and 4OLC, the US Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Purple Heart. Korea awarded the Wharang Medal w/Gold Star; and the Vietnamese awarded the Gallantry Cross w/2 palms and Silver Star and the Military Honor Medal, First Class. General Grange is a master parachutist, a Ranger, and holds the Combat Infantry Badge with 2d and 3d awards.

BRIGADIER GENERAL RICHARD J. EATON



BIOGRAPHY

Brigadier General Richard J. Eaton was born in Chicago, Illinois, April 3, 1924. He graduated from high school in Elmhurst, Ill., in 1942 and from Northwestern University in 1948 with a bachelor of science degree in economics. He received a master of science degree in geography at the University of Illinois in 1953.

During World War II, he served as an enlisted man with the 517th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, seeing action in Italy, France, and Belgium and attaining the rank of staff sergeant before leaving the service.

While earning his bachelor's degree on the GI Bill after World War II, he received a direct commission as an Infantry second lieutenant in the reserves and returned to active duty upon graduation in 1948. After receiving a Regular Army appointment through competitive tour with the 82d Airborne Division, General Eaton reentered combat in January 1951 in Korea where he served with the 3d Infantry Division as a platoon leader and company executive officer with the 65th Infantry Regiment and the 3d Ranger Company (Airborne).

He attended the Infantry Officer Advance Course at the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, from 1954 to 1955 and was then assigned to Washington, D. C., as geographic intelligence officer, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army.

His next assignment was with the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C., where he served as G-2, cavalry troop commander and S-3, 504th Airborne Battle Group.

Following graduation from the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia in December 1961, he joined the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, where he was a target system analyst until 1964.

His next assignment was program manager for combat equipment in the Bangkok, Thailand, field unit of OSD's Advanced Research Project Agency from 1964 until 1966.

General Eaton's next duty was the Chairman's Special Study Group, and its successor, the Studies, Analysis and Gaming Agency, Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, where he served from 1968 until his assignment in Germany in 1971 as 2d Brigade commander, 3d Infantry Division. In August 1972 he joined V Corps as Chief of Staff, and in July 1974 returned to Washington for reassignment to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is presently Deputy Director of Operations (Regional and Special), J-3.

Brigadier General Eaton's decorations include the Silver Star with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star with V Device and three Oak Leaf Clusters, Joint Service Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation Medal with V Device and one Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart with Silver Oak Leaf Cluster, Good Conduct Medal and Vietnamese Honor Medal 1st Class.

He has earned the Combat Infantryman Badge (3rd Award), Master Parachutist Badge, Thailand Parachute Badge, and Thailand Ranger Badge.

Mrs. Eaton was born in Gainesville, Ga. She attended Ward Belmont College in Nashville, Tenn., and Brenau College in Gainesville. The Eatons were married in September 1945 and have four children: Micheal, 26; Angela, 21; Timothy, 17; and Pamela, 15.

Dear Troopers,

My biography doesn't tell much of a story other than how we have moved around in the Service. For example, it doesn't tell the reader that the Pat from Gainesville, whom I married in 1945, was the same girl I met on the first weekend pass granted the 1st Battalion at Camp Toccoa. Jim Marshal's date, Kitty, introduced us and Kitty was a girl Jim met at the gala pre-liberation dance in the gym the week before (when Jim and I were supposed to be on guard).

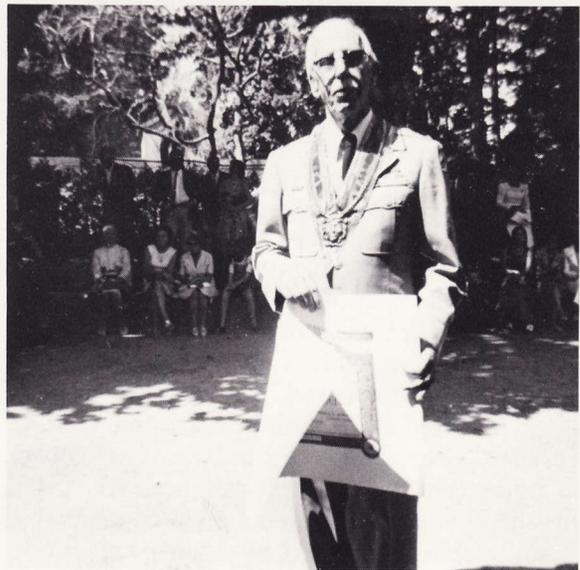
I grew up in the 517th. Certainly there was more maturing ahead, but the fact is that, like most of the 18-19 year old recruits (and some officers) who joined at Toccoa, we made a quantum jump in the 2½ years we spent together. The memories, even today, are bittersweet, as they should be of a fiercely loved combat outfit. Recollections of unbelievable hilarity, death, youthful mistakes, and foolish but beautiful bravery intertwine. Looking back over the years of assignments after I rejoined the Army, I find myself thinking that those 2½ years as a relatively undistinguished but proud enlisted soldier in Co. A, 517th Parachute Infantry perhaps contributed the most that any experience could to making the responsibilities of rank better understood and easier fulfilled.

I am looking forward to our 1975 reunion.

Yours sincerely,

General Richard J. Eaton

COL. RUPERT D. GRAVES



Dear Fellow Troopers:

The past reunions of the 517th that I have attended have always been an inspiration to me and it has been a great pleasure to see the men of the regiment and their families together during the quickly passing years. By the many responses in the thunderbolt edited so ably by Mel Edwards, there certainly should be a good turn-out for this next reunion in Fayetteville. I extend cordial greetings to all the men of the 517th Combat Team and their families and look forward with anticipation to seeing them in person on the 14th of August.

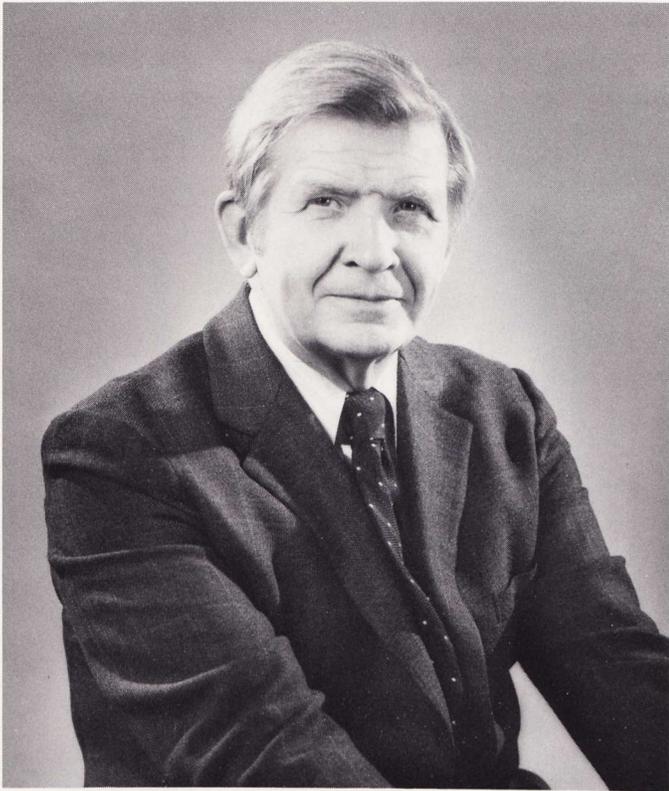
I have many vivid memories of the activities of the 517th but probably the most impressive was the first day of our airborne landings near Les Arcs in Southern France. The memory of this event was enhanced by returning to this area last year for the 30th anniversary of these landings, where you could observe the friendliness, feel the warmth and respect for the 517th of the people of this area for their liberation. Nickerson, Wedell and Edmonds also attended these ceremonies with their families.

Rupert D. Graves (Col. Ret)

This is Baron Rasque de Laval and myself taken at Chateau Ste Rosaline, taken during 30th anniversary on 15 Aug 1974.

The other pictures were also taken during the anniversary ceremonies.

TERRY SANFORD, PRESIDENT DUKE UNIVERSITY



A couple of reunions ago a Lt. General mentioned that Terry Sanford was probably prouder of having been a Lieutenant in the 517th than of serving as Governor of North Carolina.

Terry Sanford served as an officer in the 517th with distinction; he served as Governor and left a record of accomplishment that is a source of pride to his 'Tarheels', particularly in the area of education.

We hope that Terry Sanford's honesty, integrity and his many and varied talents are recognized by the American people in the next Presidential election.

My Dear Friends and Fellow Troopers:

"The great thing about the 517th Buzzards, as Colonel Graves liked to call us, is that they survived and triumphed over the battles of combat, and they seem to be surviving and triumphing over the far more difficult problems of life. It is always so refreshing to see a former member of the 517th. The spirit is still strong and indomitable. Most of the tough and ugly memories have faded with the years, and I remember most vividly the lasting and heartwarming friendships of those memorable times."

I look forward to seeing you soon. I have some problem with being out of the country in August, but I am trying my best to be here.

With best wishes always,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Terry Sanford'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent 'T' and 'S'.

Terry Sanford

Elected President – Duke University

December 13, 1969

Inaugurated: October 18, 1970

Born: August 20, 1917, Laurinburg, North Carolina, son of Mrs. Elizabeth Martin Sanford and the late Cecil L. Sanford

Married: July 4, 1942, to Margaret Rose Knight of Hopkinsville, Kentucky

Children: Elizabeth Knight Sanford (b. Feb. 3, 1949) and Terry Sanford, Jr. (b. June 13, 1952)

Religious Affiliation: Methodist

Education: Presbyterian Junior College, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, A.B. (1939), University of North Carolina School of Law, J.D. (1946)

Honorary Degrees: Terry has honorary degrees from 12 universities and colleges. He is the past and present trustee of several noted institutions of higher education and a member of Board of Visitors of others.

Served on many public service organizations and committee memberships both past and present.

Member of youth organizations, American and North Carolina Bar Associations, Council on Crime and Delinquency.

Publications:

But What About the People? 1966, Harper and Row. A description of the Sanford Administration's programs and efforts to establish a self-renewing system of quality education and related antipoverty programs for the state of North Carolina.

Storm Over the States, 1967, McGraw-Hill. A large-scale study, following a two-year research project, of the problems and functions of a state and local government, including recommendations for changes leading to a more "creative federalism." Reports on "the Study of American States."

Political Offices: Governor of North Carolina, 1961-65
Member, North Carolina State Senate, 1953-55 (representing 10th District)

Member and Secretary-Treasurer, North Carolina State Ports Authority, 1950-53 (developing port facilities in North Carolina)

President, North Carolina Young Democratic Clubs, 1949-50

Earlier Career; Special Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1941-42

Military Service: United State Army Infantry-Paratroopers; 1942-46 (serving in the European Theatre)

EDITORS NOTE: Due to lack of space, some information concerning background of men listed had to be omitted.

Medal of Honor Winner

PFC MELVIN BIDDLE

On Page 387 of a standard history book on WWII "*The Ardennes, Battle of the Bulge*," by Hugh M. Cole is the following:

"Lacking the numbers needed to envelop the German position, the infantry turned to a firefight that lasted well into the night.

Pfc Melvin Biddle, a paratrooper from the 517th tried to carry the fight to the enemy by advancing in front of his own troops to throw grenades and pick off the enemy infantry with his rifle. Later he was awarded the Medal of Honor."

This extraordinary paratrooper considers this act of heroism too ordinary to single him out for acclaim in this account of the 517. We all disagree and pay honor to a brave man who really earned the highest award bestowed by his country.

Men have tried to define bravery since the first man ran while his brother stood and faced the enemy.

Many famous soldiers, among them General Maxwell Taylor have defined it as the ultimate expression of comradeship within the combat unit. Sir Edmund Hillary, the first conqueror of Mount Everest with his Sherpa guide, agrees basically with this evaluation of bravery. He said, "But there is something about building up a comradeship – that I still believe is the greatest of all feats – and sharing in the dangers with your company of peers. It's the intense effort, the giving everything you've got. It's really a very pleasant sensation."

Brave Oriental and Asiatic soldiers have their buddy system too, only it is known as 'saving face.'

Whatever the reason that drove Pfc Melvin Biddle to heroic heights on that day, his fellow troopers of the 517th are justly proud of this Medal of Honor recipient who is as modest as he is brave.

517 PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM

This is a tribute to the young, tough, intelligent and brave junior officers and enlisted men of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment who became general officers of the United States Army. It is also a tribute to the gallant men whom they led to battle so long ago.

We also honor our own 'Gray Eagle' of the 517th, Colonel Rupert D. Graves, who knew so well how to get more than the limit out of his men; our Governor and Presidential nominee, Lt. Terry Sanford and Pfc. Melvin Biddle, that extraordinary soldier who earned the Congressional Medal of Honor.

And finally, let us honor those who have departed our thinning ranks and pay special homage to the 'young lions' who did not return from our date with destiny.

When Crete fell to 15,000 German airborne troops in 1941 against impossible odds, the American airborne program accelerated swiftly. It grew from a test platoon at Ft. Benning, Ga. in 1940, to the Airborne Command at Camp Mackall in 1943 to the present world renowned XVIII Corps at Ft. Bragg, N.C.

The history of the U.S. airborne has been a difficult and remarkable one. From the scattered drops of a parachute battalion in North Africa in 1942 to the invasions of Normandy, Southern France, Holland and across the Rhine in 1945, the growth and excellence of the airborne forces were phenomenal.

It was difficult because it had to sell new methods of warfare and compete for men and equipment against entrenched programs. Against serious handicaps in training, airborne combat units were formed which were uniformly successful as fierce fighters, and possessed of an 'esprit de corps' which was the envy of other units. Their reputation for individual and small-unit ferocity in combat won the admiration of their allies and the fear of their enemies.

The 517 Parachute Combat Team comprized of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the 596th Parachute Engineer Company held its banners high in adding its heroic saga to the history of the airborne troops of the U. S. Army.

The sword that became the 517 was forged at Toccoa, Ga., blooded and tempered in Italy and wielded with devastating effect in Southern France, the Bulge and Germany.

Many reasons have been given for the success of the 517th as a battle unit. The men had a supreme self-confidence born of careful training, superb physical conditioning and the fact their officers told them so often they were the best soldiers in the world that they really believed it and acted accordingly.

Of course, their officers were a breed apart. The

young battalion commanders learned tactical skill quickly; they learned to improvise and roll with the punches and come out fighting and on top. Lt. Colonels Zais, Seitz, Boyle and Paxton along with Lt. Colonel Raymond L. Cato commanding the 460th Field Artillery and Captain Robert W. Dalrymple commanding the 596th Engineer Company, all became masters of tactical versatility as their future careers attested.

Axis Sally began by poking fun at and trying to scare the men of the 517th. She ended by grudgingly admitting their fighting skill and in Southern France complained about the viciousness of "those bald-headed gangsters from Chicago." (The men had shaved their heads to rid themselves of vermin).

General Zais doesn't think the Southern France jump was an easy one. "They talk about the Champagne Campaign, but it wasn't that to people like us who did the fighting. Our regimental combat team had no more than approximately 2,500 men on the flank. Out of these we suffered a hundred killed and perhaps seven hundred wounded." In fact according to the legendary Major General Robert T. Frederick, "The 1st Airborne Task Force lost one-third of its men killed and wounded."

One of the last official acts of Major General Robert T. Frederick was to address the following letter to the men who had served so creditably with him, and the members of the 517th can take great pride in their contribution as a key unit of the First Airborne Task Force:

22 November 1944

To the officers and men of the First Airborne Task Force:

As I am leaving the First Airborne Task Force for another assignment I want to say good-bye and congratulate each of you on your fine performance of combat duties.

The Task Force came into being with many handicaps. There was little time to prepare for the operation for which it was formed. Few of the units knew the other units with whom they would work. Some units had to be converted for an entirely new manner of employment, and others had to be formed, trained and equipped. That the Task Force was ready on time for its difficult mission is evidence that the officers and men of the force worked well and hard.

Your accomplishments in the initial phases of the invasion of Southern France are well known. While the airborne units were landing in the rear of the enemy and disrupting his defense, the First Special Service Force was capturing Levant and Port Cros Islands. Each of these operations was accomplished

with outstanding success and materially assisted the main invasion operations.

After the beach head had been secured the Task Force was assigned the mission of protecting the right flank of the advancing Army. It was in the accomplishment of this mission that you showed your versatility, aggressiveness, and superior combat ability. You were at a disadvantage from the start. We had barely any motor transport; our weapons were light and we did not have the supporting arms normally furnished; and the terrain over which you fought was of the most difficult type. The enemy had the advantages of adequate supply, prepared fortifications and superior terrain. In spite of your disadvantages, the enemy's advantages, and the hardships you endured, you attacked with vigor and determination day after day until you destroyed an enemy division and forced back other enemy forces that were superior in numbers and especially trained and equipped for the terrain.

You may take pride in your accomplishments knowing that you performed difficult missions well. I am proud of having commanded a force of superior combat soldiers whose aggressive, offensive spirit brought defeat to the enemy throughout a long series of engagements.

I wish each of you good luck and hope that in all of your future assignments you achieve the same success that has marked your operations in Southern France.

Robert T. Frederick

Major General, U.S. Army

Just as Southern France was no picnic, the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes was the largest and most vicious battle of WWII. It was the greatest challenge of the European war and the airborne played a decisive role in meeting and overcoming that challenge. When the German counter offensive broke through the Ardennes in mid-December 1944, the strategic reserve available consisted mainly of the airborne divisions. Bastogne demonstrated the value of airborne divisions as strategic reserve. "To fight in a situation where it was surrounded by the enemy was normal for it." That is why it was probably normal for the surrounded General McAuliffe to reply "nuts" to the German request for surrender at Bastogne. All the divisions to which the 517th was attached attested to the professionalism of the unit, whose motto 'Attack!' and slogan, "True as Steel" were proven again and again to the delight of its parent unit and the dismay of the enemy.

During a short but bloody combat career the 1st Battalion, the 2nd Battalion and the 3rd Battalion

along with the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the 596th Airborne Engineer Company was each cited repeatedly for gallantry and the 517 Parachute Combat Team as a whole received numerous honors from commanders of attached divisions and armies along with decorations and the gratitude of several Allied nations.

Historians have stated that the only successful American airborne jump of WWII was that of the First Airborne Task Force into Southern France. The 517 Parachute Combat Team was the largest unit in the Task Force. The jump did not start out successfully for Lt. Col. Melvin Zais and his 3rd Battalion. Or for the 1st and 2nd Battalions. Most of the units landed in the wrong place, usually miles from the assembly point. It was fortunate that the Germans were caught by surprise.

The minute he hit the ground, Lt. Col. Melvin Zais, commanding the Third Battalion of the 517th realized that he, too, was in the wrong place. The 28-year-old officer had been slated to jump near Le Muy and to proceed with his battalion of 540 men along Route Nationale 7, for the purpose of keeping German reinforcements from getting through to the sea before the troops of the 36th Division landed.

Like so many others on that fateful morning, Zais had made a successful jump at the right time - 4:40 A.M. but had landed far from his drop zone.

One of the weaknesses of airborne drops in WW II was the inability to drop entire units together, in clusters, Thus, Zais as well as his fellow officers had to improvise as they went along.

Some of Zais' men had been hurt in landing but from the moment he touched down, Zais had been busy rounding up as many of the men of his battalion as he could.

They had landed in three separate zones scattered over eight miles. He cannot remember all the details of how he finally got them together, but says, "it was a long shot, a real piece of good luck."

While assembling, his men had managed - with bazookas and a few light weapons - to attack and destroy a German motorized column that was on its way to the landing beaches. But a long day and another night were to pass before this valiant unit, isolated in unknown territory, finally reached its destination. Just as it did so, the remaining men of Zais, battalion, who had been lost for thirty-six hours, arrived from still another direction. 'It was a fantastic coincidence,' Zais remarked, 'because neither of the two columns had the slightest idea of the other's whereabouts, yet they came together at the same intersection and at the very same minute.'

General Melvin Zais might remember the operation as, being the result of good luck, but similar stories concerning the landings of the First and Second Battalions from their commanding officers, Col. W.J.

Boyle and Col. Richard J. Seitz merely reinforce the fact that the officers and men of the 517th Parachute Infantry Combat Team were used to being surrounded; used to 'snafus'; used to being dropped miles from their assembly points and also used to using their brains and their mental and physical conditioning to make the best of a bad situation — and came out, again — on top!

This was the history of just about every unit in the entire American Airborne during WW II and is a revealing commentary on the ability of the American soldier to think on his feet and to outfox his opponent.

Of course, all the airborne jumps of WWII were successful in that the enemy was demoralized; had to shift entire divisions to cope with this new threat behind the lines and thus became much more vulnerable to the assault of the regular ground forces. But the success of the First Airborne Task Force was much greater than hoped for. All objectives were more than met and the losses inflicted upon the enemy were staggering compared to our own.

The nicknames given the airborne by the Germans attested to the respect held for those valiant soldiers. The men of the First Special Service Force, the forerunner of the present Green Berets, furnished two: 'The Devil's Brigade' and 'The Black Devils'. This famous and ferocious group attached to the First Airborne Task Force along with the 517th and other units, really earned those nicknames by blacking their faces and slipping through enemy lines, cutting throats as they went. Other airborne units were dubbed, 'Devils with Baggy Pants', 'Butchers with Big Pockets' and 'Battling Buzzards.' Of necessity, if the enemy used such terms to describe the American airborne soldier, that paratrooper was truly feared and respected.

In January, 1945 on the Place de Carre in Bastogne a sign was erected: 'Bastogne Bastion of the Battered Bastards of the 101st'.

The true bastards who fought at the Bulge had to be the 517th. It was eternally shifted from one division to another; with no place to call home; no true parent unit, it was always a welcome addition to any family of fighters but after the battles, it was again alone and wondering "Where now? Who will I go to next?"

General Sherman of Civil War fame once said, "War is hell." He preceded this phrase with, "I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine." But according to the Bible and human nature, war will always be with us. And I do not agree that its glory is all moonshine. There is something glorious about a very young man who lays his life on the line for his

buddies; who fights and attacks and leaps to the fray although he be sore afraid; who jokes while dying just to ease the pain in the eyes of his comrades-in-arms; who volunteers for combat and the soul-searing experience of his first baptism of fire so he might once and forever learn who he is, what he is and what measure of man is he? War is hell but it has its moments of glory.

War also has its lighter side. General Maxwell Taylor sprained an ankle playing squash in England and jumped in Normandy the next day. He hobbled along until he bumped into one of his men from the 101st. He hugged him like a dearly beloved brother. Then he picked up about 80 more men of the 101st, mostly high-ranking officers with a few combat infantrymen. This prompted the General later to paraphrase Winston Churchill in declaring, "Never were so few led by so many."

Once, General Eisenhower reviewed the 101st and gave a DSC for gallantry to several soldiers including a Private Rogers. He also made Rogers a corporal. Rogers celebrated by going on a binge and then AWOL. In Col. Bob Sink's absence, Lt. Col. Charles Chase busted Rogers back to private. Upon hearing this, Col. Sink admonished Chase, saying, "Charley, you can't bust Ike's own corporal." Chase replied with dignity, "Sir, I did not know that he intended the title to be hereditary."

The 517 earned fame in areas apart from combat as well. The unit called some of its actions 'improvising', others termed it stealing. In Southern France, the 517th became known as "Colonel Graves and his Five Thousand Thieves." Once, they stole six cases of Good Conduct Medals. When it was explained to Colonel Graves that they had been stolen by mistake, he suggested, "Well, what the hell, give one to everybody who hasn't gotten a venereal disease."

This writer had a short combat career with the 517th. But I'll cherish those 18 months to my dying day. Let me walk the Appian Way again toward the Eternal City with the laughter of my buddy, the young giant, Verne Dunaway and the impish Bert Woolery ringing through the olive trees as we joked about the weight of the piece of the 81 MM mortar we were carrying. Those two who never bowed their heads to any foe, bowed out to cancer this past year. So let us close up our thinning ranks and carry on as though we were all together again and young again and trading jokes and gibes and gripes again.

This was the 517th Parachute Combat Team and "this was our finest hour."

—Martin Setter

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by Jacques Robichon

AUTOGRAPHS

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