

517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team (PRCT)

460th Parachute Field Artillery, 596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company

Thunderbolt

Newsletter Date: Winter, 2014 - 2015



Serving the Men of the 517th PRCT since March 1943

Men of the 517th along with family members returned to France in August, 2014 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of their combat jump into southern France, August 15, 1944. Our own trooper Leo Dean parachutes into France to remember his fellow soldiers on this anniversary. **A special ceremony was held in Draguignan, France National American War Memorial Cemetery. See article in this issue.**

Packed in this Chute

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Greetings from the President

December 7, 2014

Pearl Harbor Day

Do you remember where you were when you heard the news? I do. I was jogging with a friend – we'd decided we'd start running – and the news was in the newspapers and being talked about. It was an unbelievable time.

I is hard to believe that the 517 is still so active and still so vibrant even as those of us left are turning 90 at least.

We're getting ready for the winter holidays here in New Jersey, but today is dreary, cold and rainy. At least it's not snow. I have a great guy who plows my driveway, but I like it even better when I don't need him at all.

As I write, we're planning on Kissimmee next month and Palm Springs in March. These reunions are fantastic opportunities to get together, raise a glass and enjoy connecting with friends old and new.

Lory Curtis is also planning yet another National Reunion! Come to New Orleans for the last week of June, 2015. Our visit will certainly include a trip to OUR museum – the National WWII museum (formerly the D-Day Museum). Make your plans now!

I am also looking back at some really wonderful 70th anniversary celebrations in France this year. We are blessed with so many true friends in France and Europe – Belgium and Switzerland especially - who continue to remember the sacrifices of US troops.

This was the first year I ever returned in October for the celebrations in Sospel, and they were truly wonderful. There, I met up with Howard Hensleigh's daughter Nancy, and her husband. Good friends Roland and Patou (aka Patricia) Orengo, along with Frederic Brega and many other friends, put on an incredible two days of events. It was an honor to be there on behalf of the 517.

Finally, I see that men of the 517 continue to be awarded the Legion of Honor; congratulations to **Tom Cross** and **Mel Trenary** on their recent recognition! If I may, that was way overdue!

Airborne all the way,

Kaare Allan Johnson

President, 517th PRCT Association

Do not hesitate to call me!

908 852 1424

Or you can snail mail me at 215 Mission Road, Hackettstown, NJ 07840.

From Your Publishers

Lory Curtis and Claire Giblin

Some of you have wondered if you've missed a Thunderbolt. No – you probably haven't. Our last one went out around June of 2014. Since then, we have had to deal with the financial reality that publishing the Thunderbolt is expensive, and that donations do not come in as steadily as they used to. We have done our best to reduce expenses: Lory found a much cheaper printer, reduced the thickness of the paper, and has swept lots of old addresses from the mailing list. We'll try to do our best to keep the Thunderbolt coming as often as possible, but four times a year is probably not manageable at this point.

In addition, maintaining the website has been decreed the Association's top priority, due to its role in preserving the history of the 517 Parachute Regimental Combat Team. That means that although the website is relatively inexpensive to maintain, due to the fact that Bob Barrett donates about 20-30 hours per week of his time for free, that we must plan for the annual payments of maintaining the website for perpetuity.

If you can put the 517 Association on your holiday gift list, we will appreciate even the smallest contribution. Yes – it is worth it to send in \$10 or \$20, and thank you!

Here is how Lory put it in Mail Call:

In reviewing the cost to publish the Thunderbolt with 264 people receiving it four times a year (quarterly) it is costing the 517th PRCT Association a little over \$3,000 per year. Joanne Barrett our recent treasurer and our new current treasurer Mimsey Kelly have informed me that the association is not receiving many dues or donations.

I am therefore asking our members (not our troopers or spouses) if they want to continue receiving the Thunderbolt to pay a \$30 annual dues or make whatever kind of donation they can.

Please remember if you have a computer, you can access the Thunderbolt online at the 517th website 517prct.org.

The 517th PRCT Association is committed to ensuring that all 517th troopers receives the Thunderbolt at no cost.

These men have sacrificed so much for us we want to make sure they can stay in touch with their association.

So if you can please send dues or donations to:

517 PRCT Association, Inc.

c/o Miriam Boyle Kelly

19 Oriole Court

Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Thank you so much for your continued support of the 517th PRCT Association. Our fathers wanted the 517th legacy to live forever, and I know that we as sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, and friends want to do all we can to keep the legacy alive!!

About the webmaster

Bob Barrett

*Bob has been getting lots of kudos in Mail Call, justifiably. He has wrestled our email problems into submission, signed us up for a new mail delivery system, keeps us all in touch with each other and keeps the news coming. But even more than all that, he has become a relentless researcher, putting all the pieces of the puzzle together. He will get family members going on their searches, responding quickly with lots of great starter information they don't yet have. He maintains the Wikipedia entry and synthesizes a weekly mountain of information, and **he does this all for free to honor the men of the 517 and their service.***

Thank you to Bob Barrett for your ongoing service to the 517!

Palm Springs Reunion, 2014

Allan Johnson

Palm Springs was different, and I loved it! We had an establishment all to ourselves, and had the run of the entire place. It was a former nudist colony, and it might even be one right now. But it wasn't the week we were there, and most of us kept our clothes on.

All of our meals were eaten right there; we did have one dinner at the local Elks Club,

as is tradition. All of the meals, unbelievably, were prepared by Master Chefs **Wayne and Karen (Frice Wallace)** and **Robin (Frice Homedew)**, assisted by **Barbara Nance, Nancy Boian, Brad and Connie Lecklider, Barb Leckliker, Scott and Deana Rossi and Diane Speelman**. The energy in the kitchen was infectious and it seemed like everyone was helping.

The first morning's breakfast was the best omelet of my life, and the great meals continued until we wrapped it up on Thursday night with our banquet -best food ever at a banquet! Both the steak and the salmon were absolutely delicious. **Wayne Wallace** is a master of the grill!

As always, it was wonderful to see everyone. We had nine veterans in total, and I'll have to count on Karen to provide the list because I know I will leave out someone.

Ever-crazy **Leo Dean** did a skydive while we were there -#161. Wayne drove him out there (during his short break from kitchen detail), and there were other fans with us as well. We enjoyed our usual Palm Springs tradition of facials one day.

Because we weren't at a hotel, our expenses were far more reasonable and our food better and cheaper than in years past. Special thanks go to Wayne, Karen and Robin, who went to bed far later than I did every night, as they prepped the next day's meals. They were incredible!

The entertainment at the banquet was Irish-themed (the weekend before St. Patrick's) and brought our gathering to a close in excellent fashion. The sun had finally come out in every way!

Reunions are so enjoyable, and I was happy to see old friends and meet new ones as well. Please plan to join us in France this August (an informal and loosely-knit gathering where we coordinate but don't necessarily travel together), January 2015 in Kissimmee and March 2015 in Palm Springs!

Foreign Friends Corner

The 517th is fortunate to have friends in Europe. These crucial people make sure that the history of the 517th is preserved and not forgotten. We are grateful to our European friends!

We will never forget the sacrifices of those young heroes.

Sebastian Smith

I have just been reading some of your website and in particular Provence Memories - Howard Hensleigh with references to Captains McGeever and Plassman and a field hospital in the village of Montauroux in The Var. I am English and have retired to Montauroux and now live in Le Prieuré, the house that was used as the field hospital. There is still neighbor a few doors along the street -rue de l'Eglise – who remembers the times very well. I have old postcards of the house and the street and would be pleased to assist in the memories in any way that I can.

Howard Hensleigh responds:

Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you very much for getting in touch with us. Amazing things happen every day regarding WWII history, and I find the contact with the owner and resident of the 517th field hospital in Montaux high among them.

The fact that the lady next door remembers what happened is also a treasure as her recollections will help us in fleshing out what happened in this story which in itself is amazing.

My first stop in my mission to bring our jump casualties back within our lines was Callian, a town I have always considered as a twin mountain town of Montaux. A man from Callian agreed to go with my driver, Frank Longo, and me to Montaux as he knew how

to get into the town without alerting the Germans who still occupied it. We went on foot cross country and were fired on by artillery while in the open.

It may have been US artillery as units of the 141st Infantry were preparing to take the town. I had talked with the commanding officer and asked him to hold all artillery and wait for another message from me before starting the attack or artillery preparation.

This man from Callian took us to the base of what seemed to me to be a wall which supported the town. We went through a door

Eddy Monfort just published his new book. Here are some notes from his FaceBook announcement:

"The baby was born! After several years of research, I have the immense pleasure to announce the publication of a new book on the battle of the bulge. A/4 format-284 pages, over 250 photos mostly unpublished, nearly 80 witnesses, military and civilian, recount us their memories and cards 20 illustrates this work. It describes the events of the American counteroffensive of January 1945 (83rd Inf.Div. and 3rd. Arm.div) in Manhay sector -Lierneux -Vielsalm -Boyd -Houffalize. "For more info, contact me on:

e.monfort@belgacom.net -thanks to broadcast!"

"Snow and Blood" is the title of the new book by our friend and author Eddy Monfort.

Very many books have been written about the offensive of the Ardennes, but few people who reveal the events of the American counteroffensive of January 1945. In this book, Eddy traces the counter-attack led by the 83rd infantry division and 3rd armored division from 3 to 22 January 1945. These are two units among many others who participated in this great battle in the forests and countryside of the Ardennes and especially the Minnow fighting through the area east of Manhay road - Houffalize. Of Manhay to Lierneux -Langlire -Chapman -Boyd -... Nearly 80 witnesses, civilian and military recount us their memories and more than 250 photos and very many maps enrich the writings of this collection. This book in format A/4 of 284 pages already available at the price of €30 from the author.

Eddy Monfort Street, Gill, Madison,
15-6960 Manhay
e.monfort@belgacom.net 0491/074925 after
19.00 hrs (Translated by Bing)

Irma and Arnold Targnion

Trois Ponts, Belgium

Dear friends of America, we are especially thinking of you during this day as we could follow the ceremonies in Normandy (on TV) In May, we attending many ceremonies on Memorial Day, in Bastogne, Henri-Chapelle, in all the villages in this area. I sent some pictures of those events.

and up some narrow steps to the level of the town and walked into the clinic undetected.

This way of entering the town seems to have been unknown to the Germans. Does this make any sense to you or present residents?

Another question I was never able to figure out is what relationship Plassman had with the Germans who were there in numbers in the same town. I am sure he spoke German and he probably tended to some of their wounded.

In any event it seemed unusual that they left town while I was there without taking any of the US casualties as POWs. It is possible that they just didn't want to be bothered in their retreat with the extra baggage. A young girl worked with Plassman and she may have something to add here.

One thing you can tell your neighbors is that you are in touch with the guy who saved the roofs on many of their houses. I was able to radio the CO of the troops ready for an artillery barrage and tell him the Germans had left town and he could come on it. I also asked him to bring ambulances to carry our casualties to the field hospital. He did that and how I accomplished my mission so quickly and easily still amazes me.

I can't take credit for brilliance, but luck or Divine Providence had something to do with it.

Doc Plassman must have worked some magic to save the casualties and himself from being taken prisoner.

I will stop here for now, but I do look forward to corresponding with you and the people of Montauraux and Callian who helped us with the casualties and in the pre-dawn of August 15.

Claire Giblin – from Fayence

Allan, Helen, Leo and I are now in Fayence for events later today. We met with the mayor last night, Jean-Luc Fabre. M. Fabre had contacted Mail Call, as you remember.

Today's events will also feature British and Canadian veterans. He is lovely and passionate about the liberation of Fayence and the history here. His grandmother was in the French Resistance, working in a shop selling newspapers and other items. At night, she would take all the ration coupons she'd

collected during the day (that part wasn't exactly clear to me -was she getting them in the course of sales and "recycling"? Or people were passing them to her for the cause?) and walk to meet with other people in the Resistance effort, putting the ration coupons to the cause.

He remembers that he was not here five years ago when we delivered the plaque to Fayence, along with a copy of Paratroopers Odyssey. He was in Frejus that day for a prior engagement. However, he told us that he made sure that all the parts involving Fayence were translated by a team of French-English translators so that the history of the 517 is well-known here.

More later-but we are touched and humbled to be here.

A letter to Merle after his visit to Belgium

DEAREST MERLE:

IT WAS A REAL PLEASURE TO MEET YOU ON SUNDAY 17TH OF AUGUST. VERY EMOTIONAL THOUGHTS CAME TO ME WHEN I THINK ON THE CRUEL WINTER OF 1944, WHEN YOU AND YOUR FELLOWS FRIENDS AS YOUNG LADS(PROBABLY THE AGE OF MY CHILDREN NOW) DESEMBARKED HERE IN THIS COLD PART OF EUROPE, TO FIGHT IN A WAR THAT PROBABLY DIDN,T MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU AS ALL OF YOU WERE SO FAR AWAY FROM HOME AND YOUR BELOVES...

HELPING IN SUCH SOLIDARY WAY TO OTHER NATIONS, BEING HUNGRY,COLD, DESPERATE,FRIGHTEN.... I CAN IMAGINE ALL THE THOUGHTS MUST HAVE RUN THROUGH YOUR MINDS....MANY OF YOU LOOSING UNFORTUNATLY THEIR LIVES, GETTING BADLY INJURED.....AND THOSE POOR MOTHERS CRYING THEIR LOST, FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.....ALL THAT, JUST TO HELP ANOTHER PART OF THE PLANET, WICH IS ,THIS OLD CONTINENT CALLED EUROPE!!!.

WE CAN NOT EVEN IMAGINED THE SORT OF TERRIBLE EXPERIENCES YOU WITNESS THAT PROBABALY STAY WITH YOU AND SOMEHOW CHANGE YOUR OWN WIV AND COURSE OF LIFE.... FOR EVER.. I

WAS VERY VERY HONORED TO MEET YOU AND MY HUSBAND JOIN ME IN THIS, AS YOU ARE A MAN OF A KIND!!, THE STRONG GENERATION, FULL OF VALUES AND SELFLESS...WHICH UNFORTUNATLY THERE IS NOT MANY NOW.

YOU ARE THE LIVING PROOF OF A GENERATION THAT WE SHOULD NEVER EVER FORGET, BUT CARRY ON PRIZING AND REMEMBER.... BECAUSE THANKS TO YOU AND ALL OF YOU WE ENJOY THE PEACEFUL LIFE THAT WE CAN HAVE NOW.

NOT TO MENTIONED, THAT I WOULD LOVE TO BE LIKE YOU IF I REACH YOUR AGE! WHAT A FANTASTIC 91 YEARS OLD YOU ARE!!!!, PHYSICALLY STRONG, IN FULL FACULTIES, AND ABLE TO CROSS DURING 24 HOURS TRAVELING, THE WORLD!!!! WHAT A REMARKABLE PERSON AND MAN AND GENTLEMAN YOU ARE! YOU ARE A LEGEND AND INSPIRATION!!!!, AND IF GOD GIVES ME THE SAME TIME OF LIFE THAN YOU I JUST WILL LOVE TO BE LIKE YOU, IN

PERFECT FORM!

YOU ARE A TOTAL INSPIRATION!!! YOU EVEN WRITE!!! AND KNOWS HOW TO USE TECHNOLOGY!!! WHAT A REMARKABLE GENTLEMAN YOU ARE! GOD BLESS YOU!

MY husband and I we have the biggest respect and admiration in the full meaning of the word for you and all young fellows who battled here in Belgium, or gave their life or injured.... because thanks to them all, as I mention above, we could enjoy last Sunday the lovely dinner in your company..... and thanks to you, your courage and their courage we could enjoy peaceful life in Europe since 1945.

And our generation and our children generation, and hopefully all the new generations to come will never have to endure anything like it!!!.

HOPEFULLY THE POLITICIANS OF TODAY WILL REMEMBER THE PASS, AND NOT CREATE THE SAME MISTAKES.

We wish you a safe journey back home. Well I can see, you have thanks God arrived well and safe!!!

Wishing you all the very best in life, keep yourself strong as you do, and we hope to see you in any near future back here. May God bless you always.

I'm really looking forward receiving your book, which I will treasure!!.. You don't get history written by people who has live it, on the first line!!!!. I will love to read it, and I will show it to my dad as well. He is a Coronel of Cavalry in Spanish Army, he will love to read it as well.

I enclose hereby the pictures we took from you all.

All the very best.

Chevalier & Teresa

Darren Bond

Aka DAZ Bond on facebook

UK

I am a living historian, and researcher from the UK. Have had an interest in the 517th and Op Dragoon for many years. This year in August was the 5th year in a row I have been in

Provence around Le Motte to celebrate and remember Op Dragoon. Was again honoured to meet Leo Dean, Allan Johnson, Joe Bail and Merle McMorrow.

In October myself and my group in honour of Gene Frice who passed in Aug and his good friend Gary Davis, who I am in regular contact with his Granddaughter Megan. We plan to do a display here in the UK to remember the fight for hill 1098 and F Company. If it's of interest to yourself and your readers we would love to be able to write up a report and or send some pictures over to you for the website or the mail call.

For my research I am very keen to correspond with members of 517th if you think this is possible?

August 2014: partial jump list for the Tour de Provence

- **Leo Dean**
- **Merle McMorrow**
- **Allan Johnson** plus family
- **Joe Bail and his extended family**
- **Tom Copsey**
- **Garry Davis's** daughter **Melanie Hanson**, husband **Scott** and daughter **Megan**.
- **Helen Beddow**
- **Mimsey Boyle**
- **Nancy Fraser Armand**

- **Joanne Barrett**
- **Wade Gilbert and Craig Stahlke**
- **Bruce and Liz Broudy**

And a good time was had by all! As always, our friends in France make these visits so special. From our first days in Sospel with beloved Patou and Roland Orenge, through the week in the Var/La Motte/Le Muy/Draguinan area with good friends Eric Renoux and Jean Michel Soldi, and then to the Fayence and Saint Cezaire celebrations as guests of Mayor Jean-Luc Fabre and Jean Marc Atlan – it was an incredible honor and tribute to the men of the 517 Parachute Regimental Combat Team.

**Calling all Troopers, Families and Friends!
Time to plan to come to reunions!**

Guys, it is time to plan! The 517 year moves on.

Kissimmee-January 2015 on MLK weekend. This year - January 17, 18 and 19. Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

Of course, there will be arrivals on Thursday and Friday, and the hospitality room should be open Friday night. Banquet Monday; getaway day on Tuesday the 20th.

Palm Springs March 9-13, 2015!!

New Orleans National Reunion on June 25-28, 2015 at the Best Western Plus Landmark Hotel, 2601 Severn Ave, Metairie, LA 70002 Find a trooper, bring memories of troopers who've made their final jump, and plan on it!!!

Back to France -August, 2015.

Sospel was fantastic this year.

Anyone interested in October, 2015?

Observances in France in the years like 66 and 69th anniversaries tend to be smaller, yes -but you can meet more people really interested in the 517.

Please think about it if you're inclined and able!

Airborne!

Claire Giblin and Karen Wallace

Public Service Announcement

Honor Flight Network recognizes American veterans for your sacrifices and achievements by flying you to Washington, D.C. to see YOUR memorial at no cost. Top

priority is given to World War II and terminally ill veterans from all wars. Honor Flight Network has expanded to include Korean War and Vietnam War veterans. In order for Honor Flight Network to achieve this goal, guardians fly with the veterans on every flight providing assistance and helping veterans have a safe, memorable and rewarding experience.

For what you and your comrades have given to us, please consider this a small token of appreciation from all of us at Honor Flight Network.

It is truly Honor Flight Network's privilege to fly our heroes to Washington, D.C. to visit and reflect at the memorials built in their honor. Our highest priority is to the aging World War II veterans along with any veteran facing terminal illness. Other veterans such as the Korean War and Vietnam War Veterans are included in our program and will be addressed in the near future. (Some hubs are already accepting applications for Korean and Vietnam War Veterans.)

If you know of someone who is a World War II veteran or a veteran with a terminal illness, please fill out an application and send it in. Our goal for 2013 is to fly at least 20,000 veterans. And remember, every veteran flies free.

For further information, please contact us at 937-521-2400 or via email at veteran-application@honorflight.org

Editor's note: Have you visited the WWII Memorial in Washington, DC yet? I know it is a long, long day from most parts of the country, but please, make it a point to get there if you are at all able to travel.

**Highlights from Mail Call
May 25, 2014-December 7, 2014
Mail Calls 2215-2244**

So great are these Veterans' Day words, Margo gets to lead off our Mail Call Highlights.

**Margo Grbinich-Hunt
Daughter of Frank Grbinich, A Company**

I wish to thank every veteran from WWII for all of their sacrifices made to make our world a better place. I truly honor and respect

every veteran of every war in which our county fought.

Howard Hensleigh

In the days of my youth, it was Armistice Day in honor of the end of WWI when the Germans signed the Armistice in a railcar at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

When Hitler had defeated France in WWII, he made them sign a surrender agreement in the same railcar. The cowardly SOB wasn't around to sign anything when his big gamble to rule the world ended in defeat. Fortunately we treated the German people much better this time around and they have been friends ever since, contributing to the world economy and peace.

Time to get off the soap box.

Personally, I rather enjoy Howard on the soap box.

Melvin Trenary

I went to a ceremony on the battle ship Texas on the 6th of June which is the 70th anniversary of the Normandy invasion & received the medal of knight of the French Legion of Honor. It is very beautiful. 36 of us received the medal at one time.

Jeff Rossi's Trip Report

My wife, Diane, and I returned last Sunday from two weeks in France. We spent a few days in Paris and ten days in Provence. We were in Nice for three days and then in Aix for eight days.

While in Nice we took a bus ride to St Paul de Vence. Spent some interesting time with a town historian discussing Dragoon. 3rd Division liberated that town. Saw the commemorative plaque.

Before we left the US and while we were there, I had been in contact with **Mickael Soldi**, who has the 517th museum. We did not have a cell phone and were only using Viber while we were there. I had hoped to meet with him but it just didn't happen. Poor planning on my part and not knowing what to expect.

However, we still were able to have an exceptional day following dad's road map which charted out the movements of the regiment and F Company in particular.

We started our day at Sainte Roseline on Tuesday morning. Drove the few miles to the DZ and from there followed dad's map as far as Coursegoules. That took us six hours. It is totally amazing terrain. Dad had always said that in is for donkeys and horses. Most of the time we had the car in third gear. All up hill.

We arrived in Coursegoules at about 4 PM and had to get back to Aix where we were staying. So, we headed south and back to A8 and onto Aix.

Needless to say, this certainly whet my appetite to get back. In part, because of the interaction with some of the younger folks who I encountered who were aware and knowledgeable of Dragoon; and because of my own personal connection to that place through dad and the time I just spent there.

Tom Reber's Trip Report

Dear Howard,

I arrived home yesterday and enjoyed a long rest. I have many pictures to review and sort, so this is just a quick report. I will provide you with more details soon.

Due to scheduling challenges, I was only able to plan one full day exploring Belgium and we encountered a few routing challenges with some road closures due to a major Formula 1 Grand Prix Race near Stavelot. I did not anticipate this event and the effects on traffic.

First, let me say that your recollections were spot on. As we approached and crossed the bridge across the Ambleve River, your recall about the 400 yards and the ridge line was exactly correct. The ridge line you remember is now being developed into residential housing with some narrow, switch back roads leading to them.

Once across the bridge and up on the ridge on the South side of the river, I could see and imagine the opposite ridge above the town of Stavelot, where you may have been camped (as you described) prior to the attack.

The town looked much as it must have been back in 1944-45. The cobblestone streets and sidewalks must be the same as they were then also.

It meant a great deal to me to walk the very same streets, alleys and sidewalks that my father and his brothers in arms walked on, seventy years ago. I had to try and imagine how this quaint, picturesque little village would have looked during one of the most brutal winters on record in Europe. I cannot imagine the conditions and level of challenges you endured, not only with the weather, but then having to fight a highly capable, determined yet desperate enemy.

Knowing that this is the area where my father took his last steps with two legs and on two feet, as a healthy 22 year old officer, looking for an Army career, was very moving. This was where his life changed, as so many did during the war.

It also brought extraordinary perspective to the massacre in Stavelot of dozens and dozens of its citizens, by the Waffen SS.

I will share more with you as so on as I organize, review and edit my photos.

Thank you, Howard, for providing me with the missing details that really put what I saw, into perspective. Your comments were invaluable to me.

Best Regards,
Tom Reber

Pat Seitz and Alan Greer

We have just finished reading the last three Mail Calls after returning from 15 days visiting Berlin, Dresden, Prague and Teresinstad, the Hitler "show camp" through which so many Jews passed on their way to the death camps. It was a trip that reminded us of the many wonderful things as well as the evil things that mankind does for other human beings and especially how important defeating Hitler was to saving freedom for all. Thus, to read the last Mail Call recounting how grateful the Czech people still are for the efforts of American soldiers was particularly meaningful this Memorial Day especially as we remember those who have recently departed this world for their eternal reward, like **Hal Beddow** and **Cecil Doty**.

Thank you, Bob to you and your Dad, for providing this place, Mail Call, where we can come together to share in the memories of the wonderful men of the 517th. The pictures of Hal and Helen especially touch our hearts! The

men we honor certainly married outstanding women.

The speech of the Ft. Bragg general at one of the reunions was wonderful as is the news of the publications of Eddy's and Jean-Loup's books.

Happy Birthday to President Johnson-- how handsome he looks (such "eye candy" he is). Congratulations to Leo Dean and to Mimsey Boyle on his latest and her first jump.

Our thanks to all for carrying on the spirit and memory of our outstanding heroes.

God bless them all.

Tom Copsey's Trip Report

It has been 2 weeks now - just want to share some highlights/thoughts about the 70th anniversary trip to Provence

- Patou and Roland-their hospitality and devotion during our stay in Sospel was unbelievable!! Yummy meals (for all 17 of us - !!) nite after nite, day after day; very touching service at their memorial; chauffeur services; tour of Col de Bras and Hill 1098; playing water Polo against and losing to Patou's Team "The Destroyers"; sipping Rose on their veranda under a beautiful Sospel full moon-an awesome,

delightful stay at "Chateau Orengo" as well as at Jean-Marie and Michele's quaint Inn.

- Leo re-liberating Chateau Sainte Rosaline and its vineyards for the umpteenth time.

- Merle McMorrow auditioning for the Tonite Show including sharing "fitness" tips; Merle also captivating Elisabeth and the young lady Biker at Col Des Bras.

- Thecontinuing devotion and worship of the French re-enactors, townspeople, and families shown to our guys

- Very, very touching ceremonies at The Rhone Cemetery at Drauginan including our own private one -thanks to our President, Alan for "arranging" for this and Claire for coordinating the details with Alison.

- Eric and Jean-Michel-merci beaucoup for all the hard work, friendship, and support in the Var Region.

- Alan, Leo, Joe and Merle -French media celebrities all.

•Outdoor dining at La Motte (great dancing!), Les Arcs (courtesy of Wade Gilbert-thanks for the pizza and beers Wade!), and Drauginan - Helen -save me another dance!

•Assisting in folding one of the lowered flags at the Rhone Cemetery and sharing a very emotional moment upon Alison's handing the flag to Dick Field of the 551st

•On my last day in Nice -giving my last two 517th pins to a shopkeeper, (who started to weep) and a young lady singing Edith Piaf and other French 1940's era songs (she was damn good) in Garibaldi Plaza

Airborne!

Steve Gomez was in France, too!

Steve Gomez is the son of Benito Gomez, 460thPFAB, B Battery

Leah and I returned to Southern France last month to observe the 70th anniversary of Dragoon but our jump on Le Muy got weathered out. As a consolation I did get to fire the 75 Pack Howitzer at the Valbourges Estate!

Joanne Barrett

Merle McMorrow, Mimsy Boyle, Nancy Fraser, Roland Orengo and myself visited our Belgium friends. Thank you to Roland who accompanied us —he was our driver and interpreter and is a good friend.

We were met at the Brussels airport by **Dieter** who escorted us to **Irma and Arnold Targnion's** home in Trois Ponts where we were warmly welcomed by the CADUSA, Eddy Monfort, townspeople and unbelievable homemade pastries! We visited **Maria Gaspar**, who was a young girl when the Nazis occupied her home in Bergeval.

Eddy Monfont took us out to the nearby fields where both **Mimsy's father Colonel Bill Boyle** and my father **Ben Barrett** were wounded. My dad and Col Boyle were wounded on the same day, Jan 5 1945, not too far from each other. Irma and Arnold, **William and Arlette Raiglot**, and **Antoine and Ghislaine Ladry**, graciously hosted us and made sure our every need was met.

Arlette Raiglot who opened her heart and home to Mimsy and myself was a 2yr old child when the Nazi's burst into her home

killing her mother and 4 and 6 yr old sisters. Arlette was seriously wounded.

We visited the plaque in Stavelot and saw the name of Arlette's family along with the many other citizens of Stavelot who lost their lives during the war. We were invited into the home of the Chevalier de Collombs and his lovely wife Teresa for a toast to honor the 517th.

The CADUSA arranged ceremonies for us at several monuments and plaques and we attended a service at St Jacques church which was destroyed by the Nazis and rebuilt after the war.

The Mayors and officials of Trois Ponts and Manhay took time from their schedules to recognize the 517th. Eddy Monfort took us to Bastogne to where we were given a private tour of the Bastogne Barracks.

On the way back to the Brussels airport we stopped at a monument plaque that had recognized **Col Bill Boyle and Major Don Fraser**.

Throughout our too short visit we were escorted and wined and dined and beautifully welcomed by so many. We heard numerous 1st hand stories from those whose families experienced life under Nazi occupation. We thank the Belgium people for their incredibly gracious welcome. It was a real honor, an unforgettable journey and we will never forget their kindness.

Merle McMorrow

I would like to publically thank Joanne Barrett for the very detailed and complete Belgian Trip Report contained in MailCall # 2234 dated September 28, 2014. Her words and pictures conveyed all the feelings and expressions of love I have for the Belgian people but I could not have expressed it as eloquently.

She totally expressed what the 517th as a Unit has always felt.

Years ago the Combat Team used to show up 75 strong and were always met with a Welcoming Committee. That welcome for one veteran was just as great and warm this year as it used to be years ago for 75 veterans. I will never forget the wonderful few days I spent among the Belgian people who, in that period

of time, strengthen the bond that has always existed between us.

Alison Quinn's trip report

Alison is Howard Hensleigh's granddaughter

Hi Poppy,

I finally have my photos from Sospel, France for you to look it. I hope you can download them from this email.

I had a wonderful time in Sospel, enjoying the impeccable hospitality of Roland and Patricia Orengo.

The man in some of these photos is Roland who took me around Sopsel to visit all the battle sites. I also wanted to tell you that I signed the US Airborne book they had as your granddaughter where many other veterans/veterans' children signed.

Enjoy the photos, and I hope all is well!

Love,
Alison

James D. Foster

Please add to the roster for 517thPRCT Company G. This veterans name is misspelled as "Stekes" in the Christmas Roster under "Privates" STOKES, Gerald G. (retired SFC)

1916 Rose Avenue
Americus, GA 31709
Phone: 229-924-6247

Mr. Stokes is excited about attending any planned reunions.

Merle McMorrow

Today when I turned the calendar from July to August, I realized that in two weeks the Forgotten War began on a Tuesday morning, August 15. That will be 70 years ago and I am beginning to feel old. The Mediterranean Edition of the Army News Paper printed Monday through Friday in Rome put out an EXTRA with a large headline that read ALLIED TROOPS LAND IN SOUTHERN FRANCE. A Staff Writer aboard one of the Troop Carrier Command Planes stated in his article that "Carefree and absolutely with no fear of Hitler's battered Wehrmacht the Yank troopers pushed each other forward in the rush to dive out the open door and pave the way for the troops who in a few hours would assault the mainland." I wonder who he talked to. It wasn't anyone I

knew. If someone told him they "were without fear" they were lying.

His article went on to say "The operation, one of the most tremendous devised by the Allied strategy, went off without a hitch. Waves of huge C-47 carried their human cargo to within

yards of the designated drop zone without incident".

Had he gotten out the plane with the rest rather than going back to write his article, he would have found that some landed miles, rather than yards, from their designated spot.

It is so easy to forget history but you Bob are helping to preserve and keep it alive.

FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions: France

Lots of people ask about travel to France year-round and for the memorials in August. Here are the simple steps to getting started:

Start planning now for the south of France in August. Figure on arriving say 11 or 12 August; events will take place in Var/La Motte/Les Arcs/Draguinan/Le Muy for 15 and 16. We do not have any formal notices of events yet, but that is usually the last of the details to fall into place. For those that are thinking about joining us -start here:

1. Do you have a current, valid passport? Please check. Find it and look at the expiration date. Renew if necessary; sometimes you need to get a new one even if the old one is good for another 6 months.

2. Flights -Nice is the most convenient airport.

3. Dates: arrive by about 13 August for La Motte/Les Arcs/Draguinan. Depart: not before 18 or 19 August. Adjust this as you wish for you and your family. You might want a side trip -it's a long trip not to!

4. Hotels -usually our friends in Sospel (Patou and Roland Orengo) and in the Var (Jean Michel Soldi and Eric Renoux) make the hotel arrangements for us after we ask them; the websites often don't work internationally. But maybe you'd like to rent a home or stay elsewhere. Whatever -but make sure that someone is making the arrangements. Hotels are getting tight.

5. Rent a car -or make sure you've got a seat in someone else's car.

Howard Hensleigh, in a regularly recurring feature, "History with Howard."

Howard is an avid follower of weekly Mail Calls, and a frequent contributor as well.

To Les Fenton, regarding his father:

Thank you for message and for this one which is a tribute to your father's life after the time he spent as a leader in the heavy machine gun/bazooka platoon of Headquarters Co., 3rd Battalion, 517th.

From what we knew of Frank then, this tribute is no surprise. He was too busy with his responsibilities to the Township to attend our summer reunions, but we did track each other down. When we were in touch many years ago, it took me a while to figure out where the North East Township of PA was located.

I looked at the north east part of the state, but it wasn't there. It was a surprise to find that is further north than any other township, but in the small North West part of the state that joins Lake Erie.

I still give your father credit for saving my life by his accurate BAR fire into that house south of the tracks in our D plus one attack on the south end of les Arcs. He was a good man and you are to be commended for your remembrances of him.

Highest Airborne regards,
Howard Hensleigh

Howard on the Battle of the Bulge

I will not describe an entire major battle, but just one part of what was known as the Battle of the Bulge beginning on the 16th of December 1944 and lasting a month or two into the winter of 1945.

Background:

After the Rome-Arno campaign in Italy, my outfit the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team (the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the 460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the 596th Parachute Combat Engineering Company) as a part of the First Airborne Task Force, parachuted into Southern France.

After we completed our invasion mission of providing an "umbrella" to keep German forces from reaching the seaborne forces on

the beaches of S. France, we pushed the German army all the way back into Italy. This kept us on the lines in constant combat for more than ninety days.

We then shipped to northern France in 40 and 8 box cars and were to have Christmas in training for a winter offensive. The Germans beat us to the draw and attacked the weakest part of the Allied lines on December 16, 1944. At that time the troopers of the 517th were 18th Airborne Corps under Lt. General Ridgeway.

My Third Battalion of the 517th PIR was credited for retaking Manhay, Belgium, the first territory retaken from the Germans as we began to turn the Bulge inside out. We were ordered to take it at all costs.

Manhay is a road center the Germans could use to fan out their armored attacks if they could hold onto it. Manhay was occupied by an SS battalion, dug in with good fields of fire.

Here is how it happened. **General Ridgeway** had pulled our G Company out to guard his 18th Corps command post. So we had only two line companies for the attack. We also had the battalion Headquarters Company which contained the communications section, the 81 heavy mortar platoon and the machinegun/bazooka platoon.

After heavy artillery concentrations on the town our attack was ordered to begin at two in the morning of December 27, 1944. Our attack order was a column of companies with I Company leading, then H Company and Hq. 3rd.

The artillery lifted at 2 o'clock as planned and **Lt. Stott's** platoon of I Company led the attack on the run. Then some big Allied artillery unit fired a salvo which was both late and short. It killed Lt. Stott and half of this platoon. The rest of the battalion ran through this carnage and fought house to house, fox hole to fox hole and had Manhay under control within two hours. We eliminated many of the enemy and sent about fifty of the worst German troops of the hated SS Divisions back to regimental headquarters as prisoners of war.

Then German artillery opened up on us and we repelled three counter attacks.

We were pulled out the afternoon of January 1, 1945, for other operations of the

18th Airborne Corps to reverse the losses occasioned by the Bulge.

Howard on Stavelot

Tom Reber went to Belgium to retrace his father's steps; Howard shared some memories with him.

Here is what I remember.

We went up a steep slope of open land from the river to what I call a ridge here there were small stands of trees. Then the line of attack south seemed to flatten out some but still was hilly. It was dotted with farm houses and barns with most farmers having milk cows and hay in the barns.

Although the writers of our 517th history indicate that the story of **Lt. Col. Paxton's** putting a cow out of its misery by shooting it in the head with his 45 as we ran by in the attack was the official version of his killing a perfectly good cow for the troopers to feast on, the cow he shot actually was down in the snow and would not have survived the night.

There may have been some small farm communities in the area, but I do not recall anything I would call even a fair sized town. Most of the area was open with stands of trees here and there. The open areas I'm sure were used for pasture, hay and crops after the snow melted.

There was one farm family I will never forget. Although most of the families had deserted the fighting area, this family stayed. Their farmhouse and buildings were nestled down among the surrounding hills. The farmer had gathered his neighbors milk cows into his barn where he milked them night and morning. His beautiful little ten or eleven year old daughter, all decked out in her Sunday best, greeted the troops as they moved forward in the attack. She had a bucket of milk and a big pitcher in hand pouring milk into each trooper's canteen cup as he passed. We had had nothing but powdered milk since leaving the States, so you know what that meant. She was not entirely fluent in English, but got the full meaning of a few troopers who on bended knee asked, "Will you marry me?" There were lighter moments of comic relief even in the midst of a deadly attack and our troopers always made them happen.

Although many things can change in an area in 70 years, I think you will find this area about the same as we found it in January, 1945.

If you do run across this little girl, I am sure there will be changes. It is hard for me to visualize her as an 80 year old grandmother. She might find changes in me too.

Pat Seitz and Alan Greer

Please convey to **Joanne** our how grateful we all are for her service as Treasurer (besides all the other things she had done for the 517th and its members and their families (will always be thankful for how she looked out for Dad at one reunion that I couldn't attend and he didn't feel well and gave everyone a fright).

Words can't express that gratitude. Your Dad left remarkable "chips off the old block" in the two of you.

God bless you both and **Mimsey** for picking up the reins.

Bill Bolin

Hello to all the guys in "C" Co. 517th. Would enjoy seeing a message from **Nolan Powell, Deacon Jones, Paul Vukovich** & anybody else who remembers me. Bonnie and I will soon be driving up to Oregon for my Bolin family reunion where I was raised in The Dalles. Will visit a daughter and son-in-law in Portland and go to the ocean at Newport for a week vacation while up there. A daughter in Northern California will accompany us and help with the driving.

We are drying up in California after 7 straight years of drought, this year has been the worst. The reservoirs are just about empty and our household water is rationed severely. There are indications that the El Nino' is warming up and may bring some of the tropical storms up this way next winter, so we are hopeful. If that doesn't happen it is going to get ugly.

Christopher Lincoln **Clincoln92@yahoo.com**

My father **Raymond E. Lincoln** was in A Co. 517th and passed away in April of 2001. Always proud and never backed away from a

fight for what was right. One time 3 of his buddies came to visit at once. What a time we had. Fishing, eating and drinking. So fortunate for me to spend time with these guys!

John J. Stojan

I Co. -3rd BN

On August 15th it will be 70 years since the 517th PRCT took part in the invasion of Southern France. Actually, my commemoration won't be for a couple of more months when I reported to Capt. Jim Birder as a rifle replacement in Sospel. (I Co.) Enclosed is my check for my 2015 Association dues. I hope you can forward this to Miriam Boyle Kelly, the new treasurer. I don't have her address but I have yours. I didn't send in my ballot on the question of merging the Association and Auxiliary (no excuse), but I have in previous correspondence to you indicating how I felt about the uniting of work of the Auxiliary in keeping alive the memory of the 517th PRCT. Without people like you, Joanne, Claire, Helen, Brenda, Lory, Mike, the Frices on and on, we would be history years ago. I would like to know who the 11% who voted against the merger were. If this included any "old timers", they should be "drummed out" or I personally un-friend. (I retract that suggestion as I have few friends left.)

Best wishes to everyone in the 517th family, I treasure the memory of all of the troopers like your dad, Ben. God bless everyone.

Fred Waites

As soon as I can I have a good deal of photos and some memorabilia of his that I want preserved. I figure in 2 generations, dad's descendants will not fully appreciate these. Would you be interested in me driving up your way to show you what I have? With modern high resolution scanning some of the photos might be worth archiving.

Thanks for the condolences. Dad was a good and gentle guy. Spent a career teaching and coaching HS kids. He never talked much about the war. About all he'd say is "I saw some terrible things." One thing that he dwelled on were the impoverished children he came across and from time to time he'd talk about 3 of his best buddies. One of those told me dad

was extremely bothered by a particular fire fight. Late in the war, while participating in a squad size assault on a German fixed position entrenched in a tree line ... he and one other guy were the only 2 that made it in harmed. They were able to scatter the Germans and overtake a machine gun position. All the other troopers were either killed or wounded. He recalled that 2 troopers were killed. I do not recall where. Dad never mentioned this to us boys.

He did tell a story about he and a Lt. James(?) jumping on Aug. 15. They were to push out a bundle. It hung up. And in an effort to get it out the door, it suddenly let loose and all 3 went out together. By a miracle the lines never entangled. Dad was tubing and the shoot popped with him head down. Wrenched his shoulders. He hit a rock terraced wall and smashed his nose. It was crooked forever more. He did get up with James ... but upon greeting in the dark, they were so on edge that neither recalled the password. Dad told me it was something like Lafayette -Freedom. But he was not sure.

Huddled together and awaiting daybreak, they were approached by what they identified as two Germans. After no answers to the password and hearing mumbling that they could not understand they pitched a grenade toss. The next morning they found the dead "Germans" some poor farmer's beef cow! He told me that he and James swore an oath to never tell the story to any of the troopers.

I tried to get him to write a memoir but he never did.

Fred Waites

Hi Fred,

Sounds like some great stories. My Dad was the same way --he never talked much about this war days at all when we were kids, other than showing us the hole in his back from a mortar shell. It wasn't until he reconnected with the 517th in his later years that I found out about

The 517th. Being an independent "swat-team", assigned wherever the help was most needed, it was difficult to find much of anything about the 517th's history online before my Dad and I started the website.

So yes, I would love to have copies of anything you would like to share. My intention is to keep the website and all its archives available as long as I am alive, and by then hopefully, we can put it into the hands of the army or some historian site for preservation. I don't want the original photos and artifacts --I'd rather have them stay with the family. But I want to digitize as much as I can just to preserve the stories and the history for friends, family, and researchers.

If you can digitize the photos yourself, I can receive any format or size. If not, get back to me and we'll figure something out.

Thanks,
Bob Barrett

Pat Seitz and Alan Greer

We have been on the road since Sept 5th so are just catching up. To open the oldest Mail Call and see that Darrell has cut his earthly bonds and joined his brethren in heaven greatly saddened us. We loved the man and his smile! He was a character in many ways, but also a dynamo who passionately cared about his comrades in arms. Thank you for posting his picture so we could cherish his smile once more.

We feel very blessed to have known him and been sassed by him! I hope his family knows that he and they are very much in our thoughts and prayers.

PS: The news about Darrell, dampened a bit the pleasure of seeing the fabulous pictures from the 70th Anniversary trip, but as you and I know, it is important to brace ourselves for more sad news and focus on the joy of having had the pleasure of having these fantastic men touch our lives.

Claire Giblin

Visited **Howard Hensleigh** today! He reminisced about arriving in Trois Points. "We arrived as the Germans were leaving. We could hear their engines. Outside the town, there was a sign that said Off Limits to all Allied Forces. We went in anyway. "

And then he gave that wonderful wicked laugh.

517 Recollections
Major Donald Fraser

"I was leading the way down the road towards the Chateau Sainte Roseline with a flanker downhill to my left and another uphill to my right. Chopper was about twenty yards behind me and the others strung out along the road behind him. I was watching my flankers when **Chopper** yelled and then fired a couple of shots. I had walked right by a German in a slit trench. He would have killed me but Chopper got him first. Kienlen jumped down in the ditch and came up with an Iron Cross and a small pistol in about ten seconds. He smiled and waved me on."

Major Donald W. Fraser
A/517 CO and then 1/517 XO

Earl Tingle

Subject: Bob... A discovery at the American Cemetery in Brittany

After the trip to Normandy for the D-Day celebrations, I took a couple of extra days and visited parts of Brittany. On my list of places to visit was the American Cemetery at St James. In front of the Chapel there's a wall with names of the missing in action -soldiers and airmen. There are 8 names on each panel and there are 62 panels for a total of 496 names.

I was just ambling along reading some names and noting units, branch of service, etc., and this panel (photo 0615) jumped out at me. Maybe you know about PVT Gruwell and have records of his death and disappearance. If not, there may be family members of the 517 who'd like to know about this cemetery and his name among the missing in action.

Editor's note: Bruce Malone, who has been the Superintendent at the Rhone American Cemetery for roughly three years, has been promoted and will be an Assistant Superintendent at Brittany shortly. Bruce has become a friend to many of us, and we wish him well at his next post.

A Company!

Chet Kochersperger

WOULD YOU ENROLL ME IN MAILCALL? I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR THE NEWS. I WAS IN A CO. 1ST BAT. UNDER **COL. BOYLE.**

JUST WROTE A LETTER TO THE THUNDERBOLT TO ASK ABOUT MEDALS AWARDED TO OUR UNIT.

GOOD TO READ THE NEWS.
RURUK8@VERIZON.NET

Dear Bob,

You are correct about the Trois Ponts. I led a platoon patrol into was in the bulge turnaround in Belgium. It was not a usual 3rd Bn. patrol. I think the order for it came from the 82nd to which we were attached, because we ran into

Jim Gavin on the way out of town. As Claire mentioned, there was a huge sign on the way into town stating that the town was off limits for Allied troops and laying out the heavy fines for any soldier caught violating the order. It was probably a probe patrol to see what if anything the Germans were doing in the town.

They gave me a platoon from one of the rifle companies to go in and find out. The platoon sergeant was in charge of the platoon and none of my S-2 men accompanied us. Since I had only a platoon, I considered it an intelligence gathering patrol, rather than a combat patrol. As we came into the town, we heard the motors of their transports and soon saw them leave. Not a shot was fired.

We checked and found none were left behind. I don't think any civilians were there either. We had the town to ourselves for the night. After reporting to 3rd Bn. HQ, I had the platoon sergeant post guard and told him to keep track of his men so we could assemble fast if we had visitors. The houses were nice and nicely furnished. I told the sergeant where I would be and hit the sack between clean sheets and warm comforters, a rare occasion in the Bulge since Hooper had borrowed and abandoned my bedroll early in the Bulge.

As we were on our way out of town up a steep hill **Major Gen. Jim Gavin** and a lone rifleman approached us cross country. He spoke with the platoon sergeant and apparently was satisfied we had completed our mission and that Trois Ponts was free of the enemy.

In looking back on it, we were fortunate with perfect timing to accomplish our mission without casualties.

Highest airborne regards,
Howard H.

Searching for information

Many of our online readers are seeking information about their fathers, grandfathers or uncles. The trail has grown cold for them. Veterans of the 517, if you have even a little information or a blurry photo, it could be much more than these families ever hoped for. Please, see if you can assist any of these friends of the unit.

Alex Hunt

AlexHunt08@gmail.com
404-723-5350

My grandpa **Frank Grbinich** was the 517th PRCT Association's president from 1985-1987. He passed away in 1995 when I was 9 years old. I hope to meet some men that may have known my grandpa through this email group. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Robert & Angela Hosbach

I am searching for a picture of my brother-in-law. KIA June 25, 1944. He was in the 517th, Company C. His name is **John Herman Hosbach, Jr.** We have the Company photo, but on it is written that John wasn't in the photo & was KIA.

We were hoping someone might have a snapshot or something he is in. We have no photos of him at all so this would be very meaningful.

Thank you to anyone who has any information.

Jeff Moats

jmoats58@yahoo.com

My father **James Moats** was in the 517th PRCT G Company. He was WIA in Sept. 1944. Any information regarding my father would greatly be appreciated. I have his jump pants and photos including the 1943 Parachute Training Manual.

Robert David Hartsock

Redding, CA
rhartsock1967@hotmail.com

My grandfather, **Robert Hartsock**, is listed on his headstone as a member of Co. I, 517th Par. Inf during WWII, and the army lists him as serving from 1943 to 1946 being discharge as a member of the 82nd AB. Would like to know more about his service from

anyone who might have information. Thanks,
Robert Hartsock.

Margo Grbinich-Hunt

I am the eldest daughter of **Frank Grbinich** who served in A Company of the 517th. I would like to stay informed of the happenings with the 517th!

Also, are there any men still living from A company? My Dad used to stay very active and was even a reunion chairperson before he passed away in 1995.

Thank you.
margo511@aol.com

Hillary

Wisconsin
aussiesrule09@live.com

Cpl Daniel Fisher (HQ Co. 1st Battalion) is my grandma's brother. "Uncle Dan" as he's referred to here. My grandma is 93 years old and going strong. Dan and my grandma look so much alike-probably the most similar of all their siblings. She still has the newspaper clipping of when Dan's death was announced in the local newspaper. Thanks for maintaining this website and thank you to all Veterans for your service.

Hi Hillary,
Thank you for your note on the 517th website guestbook.

There have been several discussions in our newsletters over the years about Danny Fisher and his needless death on Aug. 15, 1944.

I don't know if this is of interest to you, but I have attached two photos, one of his gravesite in Draguignan, and a copy of a "short snorter", a dollar bill signed for good luck by many men of HQ Co., including Danny Fisher.

Regards,
Bob Barrett

THANK YOU so much for the pictures. I showed the pictures to my grandmother (Florence 'Fisher' Kozelka) just now and she was pleased. This is the first that she has seen of his gravesite. She has a framed 8 x 10 of the Rhone Cemetery in her bedroom, but has never seen the specific gravestone. She talked

about how my great-grandma made the decision to not bring him back from Europe ("to let him rest in peace"). I think you've brought her some peace now that she has seen exactly where her brother is.

They are building a veteran's memorial in our town within the next couple years and he will be included on it. That's actually what provoked my search today and I'm so glad that I ended up at your website. I hope someday I can get to France to see Uncle Dan in person. Again, thank you!

Hillary Bark

Seneca, WI

Editor's note: I am touched by the meaning of a photo of an overseas grave to a loved one. Please know that the American Battle Monuments Commission provides photos of graves, either at a nominal cost or free, to relatives of those buried in overseas cemeteries.

Updates

SSG Derek Baxter

derek.john.baxter@us.army.mil

CPL **John Brunner** passed on 14 JUN 2014, he loved reminiscing with me about his experiences with the 517th and enjoyed his newsletters. If any of you are still in touch with the boys at the reunions, let them know he is securing the DZ with the rest of them in heaven.

Randolph Martz

Past President, National 4th Infantry Division Association, Northwest Chapter

Sorry to report the passing of **Richard Baysinger** in Wenatchee, Washington. He was assigned to the 517th at one time. Please include his name in the TAPS section of the Thunderbolt so those who served with him or knew him will have the information.

Best regards to you and all the great Americans in your association.

Mike Wells

On Saturday, July 19, 2014, I attended the funeral, with **Lory Curtis**, of one of the veterans of the 517: **Hoyt Frank Kelley**. The funeral was well attended and the speakers were able to convey information about a life

well lived. I came away wishing I had met Hoyt much earlier than I did.

Lory did a very good job of representing the Military, in general, and the 517 specifically, in his remarks to the family attending the funeral. I know he was quite honored to be asked to present the flag to the family.

On the back of the funeral program was printed "The Commodores Prayer." The last two

Sentences were emphasized by one of the speakers as being very applicable to Hoyt Kelley: "Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people. And give me, Lord, the grace to tell them so. Amen." It really seems that Hoyt Frank Kelley came from a great family, learned at an early age to work hard, served his country with honor in a unit that he was very proud of, returned home to accomplish a great heritage in his work, and raised a great family. One of the family speakers related that they once asked Hoyt what he learned most in the Army. He replied, "How to MARCH!" And to quote that speaker, "He continued to MARCH the rest of his life!"

Hoyt Kelly was born in a small American town, Thatcher, Utah. He MARCHED through life, inspired many people to do their best, and raised a family that will long be a tribute to a great man.

Hoyt Frank Kelley will be missed.

Gene Frice Remembered

Claire Giblin

We are shocked and saddened to hear of the loss of Gene Frice only days before his planned trip to Europe with family and friends.

To receive this news around the dinner table in Sospel was especially moving as we were all gathered around where he should have been with us.

It's nearly a week after his funeral now, and the shock hasn't worn off. Gene was a charismatic trooper and was fiercely proud of his service with the 517. If you didn't know about the 517, you would after you met Gene.

He was generous with his time and shared his experiences freely. I thought he had some of the most memorable moments in A Cut Above.

It was an honor to be with Gene and his family in Europe for events at the 60th and 65th anniversaries. It was touching to be here where Gene was repeatedly honored as a guest who had been expected here for the 70th and died unexpectedly. He was remembered at La Motte, Le Muy, the Rhone American Cemetery, Les Arcs, and Valbournes -and when I walked in to see the picture of him by candlelight in the chapel at Valbournes on August 16, which was the day of his funeral, I was so pleased and touched to see him remembered in so many different places and ways.

Words are insufficient and the loss is so great. Our hearts and prayers go out to Gene's family at this difficult time.

He was so special and represented the 517 so well.

Rick Sweet

I just got my computer back in working order and am catching up on the news. I am so sorry to hear of the passing of **Gene Frice**. He looked so young. I am amazed by his resume and everything he has accomplished during his life. There are many 517th soldiers who turned out to be great men and I admire them all great and small. I miss the national reunions and look forward to seeing you all soon.

Tim Eaton

son of Cpl. **Richard J. Eaton**, A Company

Dad passed away in 2010 and we miss him terribly. We were lucky to have him as long as we did and carry his integrity and courage in our hearts.

God Bless....

Editor's note: I have checked back through Thunderbolts, and I don't see that we ever published news of Brigadier General Eaton's death. Forgive me if this obituary is a rerun, but it was also in Mail Call recently.

Richard John Eaton, Brigadier General (US Army Retired) passed away unexpectedly on Saturday May 15th, 2010. "Dick" was 86 years old and resided in Nashville, TN.

Born to Leland E. Eaton and Caroline Simonson Eaton in Chicago, IL April 3rd of 1924, Dick attended school in Elmhurst, IL including Elmhurst College. Enlisting as a

private in the army reserves in 1942, Dick had a distinguished military career including combat service as a paratrooper in Europe during WWII with the 517th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, in Korea with the 3rd Ranger Company (Airborne), and in Vietnam as a combat command officer with the 1st Infantry Division. Dick retired from the army in 1976 as a Brigadier General with many commendations and honors. His 33 years of service included tours of duty in Pakistan, Thailand, Germany, and with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. He held a BS from Northwestern University, a Master of Science in Geography from the University of Illinois, Urbana, and was a graduate of the National War College.

Dick married Patricia Baldwin of Gainesville, GA in September of 1945 and together they raised 4 children during their world travels. Dick took advantage of living in each country to teach his children respect for different cultures, and religions, and about the opportunities available. His son, Michael trekked in Northern Pakistan and the Himalayas with him at the age of 8 years, and again in Northern Thailand when he was 15 years old; all his children went to international schools around the world and learned to be curious, explore and enjoy adventure. Dick and the family skied in Europe, and his kids and grandson still enjoy the sport as a family activity. Dick enjoyed bluegrass, jazz, and opera. He and his wife Pat shared a love of musicals and danced like Fred and Ginger. His beloved wife, Pat, passed away in October of 1999.

When Dick retired from the army, he joined the Staff at The Pennsylvania State University in the Strategic Studies Department and continued academic studies while sharing his knowledge and experience with advanced studies students. In 1990, Dick and Pat moved back to her native Gainesville, GA where they served in volunteer organizations and enjoyed travel, relatives and friends.

Dick is survived by his second wife Margaret Eaton of Nashville, TN, whom he married in 2001, and his children: Michael Eaton and Angela Eaton Snovak of Evergreen, Colorado, Pamela Eaton of Chula Vista, California and Timothy Eaton (wife, Phyllis)

and grandchildren Kailey and Dillon Eaton of St. Louis, Missouri.

Colonel Gene “Sir” Frice

September 9, 1925 – August 9, 2014

Colonel Gene “Sir” Frice was born in Long Beach, California in 1925 to Arthur Frice and Ethel Craig. Spending most of his childhood in and out of boys’ homes, Gene was introduced to discipline and military life by way of the NOTC (Naval Officer Training in High School). This made the transition from civilian to soldier an easy one for Gene as he enlisted in the U.S. Army at the ripe age of 16 just after the Pearl Harbor attacks. In 1943, Gene volunteered for parachute duty and was sent to Camp Toccoa in Georgia where he eventually became a member of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team who would later drop into the Battle of the Bulge and Operation Dragoon (airborne and amphibious operation) in Southern France, the 2nd largest airborne operation in WWII. Gene also served with the 82nd Airborne in Berlin dispersing Polish and German refugees evicted from their homes by the Soviets.

After his honorable discharge from the Army in 1945 he worked 5 years serving as a lifeguard while attending college eventually receiving a Masters of Science in Public Administration and Police Science. In 1949, Gene entered the U.S. Army Reserve. In 1956 he began the first of 10 years as a Criminal Investigator with the County of Los Angeles in one of the first Public Defender offices in the U.S.; additionally he worked 10 years as a Special Agent with the California Department of Justice conducting criminal investigations of organized crime and terrorist activities. By 1970 Gene took a leave of absence from the DOJ to ultimately serve as Chief of Law Enforcement Training and Terrorism Programs at the California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI). Following this in 1986 he organized the first U.S. Army Reserve Special Forces unit which eventually covered the Western US as a Special Forces Battalion.

Gene organized the first U.S. Army Reserve Special Forces unit which over the years became a large unit covering the western U.S. as a Special Forces Battalion and in 1986 Gene attained the rank of Colonel.

From 1986 to 1990 he served with the Department of Energy, Transportation and Safeguards with the responsibility of training DOE Couriers in transporting sensitive assets for the U.S. Government. Finally from 1980 to 2008, Gene was employed by a contract agency and was in charge of the security of the Internal Revenue Service in Fresno, CA as well as 11 years as Security Site Manager for the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, CA.

Gene volunteered for the National Ski Patrol for nearly 50 years with National Number 2028. He also volunteered with many different county search and rescue teams and enjoyed hiking, skiing, biking, was an avid pilot and had many "offices" in Bend including Deschutes Brewery, McMenamins Old St Francis School, Anthony's, and Chow. Gene known by many as "Sir" could often be found drinking scotch in front of a nice bonfire.

Our Father **Darrell Carl Egner**, 90, peacefully passed away September 1, 2014, in Jacksonville, Florida.

Darrell was born in Wausau, Wisconsin on October 2nd, 1923 to Carl Egner of Wisconsin and Minnie Kolateck of Minnesota and grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota.

At the advent of World War II Dad joined the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment in May of 1943. In his life our Dad had innumerable, significant, accomplishments and may have been most fiercely proud of his participation and fellowship with the other 517th Paratroopers. During the war, they accumulated over 150 combat days during five battlefield campaigns in Italy, France, Belgium and Germany. In that time, the 517th went 94 days without relief on the front lines, a record that still stands today. Darrell was awarded many medals, awards, and citations that include the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, among many others. Our Father also stayed very active in the 517th PRCT Organization with the surviving Troopers, and was the 517th PRCT Organization's President for 2 years and was also made the 517th Man of the Year in 2010. In 2011 President Sarkozy of France decreed Darrell a Chevalier (Knight)

of the Legion of Honor which is France's highest honor for his participation in the liberation of France during World War II.

One of Darrell's fondest memories was after he was discharged from the Army on December 20th, 1945, he arrived home to his Mother just in time for Christmas. Later, he received his B.S. in Engineering from the University of Minnesota which then led to a series of jobs.

Our father was an accomplished businessman and an avid pilot. His love of travel took him all over the United States for work from California to New York. He eventually settled in Florida in the 1950s, by which he ended up in his adopted city of Jacksonville by 1960. Darrell, in his retirement, was very active in various charitable organizations such as professional women's tennis as an Umpire for several years. Darrell was greatly loved and admired by his friends and extended family. As our Father, he was a great teacher, example of virtue, and always very passionate about his children and their children. He will be eternally missed by all of us. He is on his way to Heaven to join his beloved Mother, Sister, and Father.

Tim Curtis

There will be a smile on my face, laughter in my heart, and warmth in my soul because **Darrell Egner** was my friend. We will miss you Darrell. I can only imagine the ruckus you and your buddies are causing on the other side.

Lory Curtis

I am so saddened to hear of the passing of Darrell Egner. He was a very good friend and I will miss him dearly. Darrell served on our board and as President of the 517th PRCT Association. I can remember seeking guidance and counsel from him many times about 517th issues. He will be deeply missed.

My prayers and condolences go out to the Egner family. May the Lord bless you in your time of grief.

Brenda Verbeck Mortensen

Like so many, I was saddened to hear of the passing of Darrell Egner. He was a joyous presence and a great behind the scenes helper

at the Kissimmee reunions, and he was a very kind man. When Jim was in hospice care, Darrell came to spend several hours with us. Not an easy thing to do, and it was much appreciated.

Hal Roberts lived a life that few will ever live again--from his family farm in the Dakotas to limping west in the family jalopy, from trumpet in jazz bands to fighting the Battle of the Bulge in the 517th prct. His was a life they write books about, although he'd never admit it. Hal passed on August 12, 2014, at the age of 92. He leaves his loving wife Jeanne. Services were on September 5, followed by burial at Tahoma National Cemetery.

Claire Giblin

We are so sorry to hear of the death of **Hal Roberts**. A joy to meet at reunions, he was gentle and generous. Hal had one of the most memorable stories in "A Cut Above," involving his friendship with a European child during the war.

Mel Trenergy

Homer B. Leonard age 89 a native Houstonian passed away on August.21, 2014. I didn't know him. He was in the 517th PRCT. Maybe you can find what co. He was in. I always check the obit. To see if I'm in it. Thanks!

Homer B. Leonard, D Company, age 89, a native Houstonian, & Spicewood, Tx resident passed peacefully on August 21, 2014. He was preceded in death by his wife, Renate, who was the love of his life for 50 years. He was a '43 graduate of Culver Military Academy Co.C and served in WWII in the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. He went on to graduate from Rice University.

He was very adventurous in life and left a huge footprint on many people's hearts.

Homer is survived by his two sons, Leslie and Larry Leonard, his daughter, Renee Leonard White, four grandchildren, Erin O'Neill Garcia, Matthew O'Neill, Alexander Leonard and Nicholas Leonard, and one great grandchild Claire Garcia.

Memorial services were held on October Bee Creek United Methodist Church, Spicewood, TX.

Bekki Filipczak

bekkifilipczak@gmail.com

Thanks in part to this website I was finally

able to track down the family of **Allen Douglas**; the man who saved his life on September 9, 1944. My grandfather, **Henry Filipczak**, is now 90 and this was a great blessing for all of us.

Frank J. Fiermonte

Obituary Frank J. Fiermonte, 94, resident of Naples, FL and formerly of Camillus, NY, passed away on Tuesday, September 30, 2014. Mr. Fiermonte enlisted in the Army in 1940 and was assigned to the 28th Infantry Regiment A Company at Fort Niagara, NY. In 1942, he served as one of the original members of the 551st Parachute Battalion B Company, In Panama. He served as Staff Sgt., including the time the Battalion spent attached to the 82nd Airborne Division in WWII. He also served in the 517th Parachute Regiment in 1945. Mr. Fiermonte served in Operation Dragoon, the invasion of Southern France, and was wounded during his participation in The Battle of the Bulge. He was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman Badge and several other medals. Mr. Fiermonte owned and operated Ace Eastwood Taxi in Syracuse for 28 years and also drove bus for Centro in Syracuse for 17 years. He most recently drove a tram in Naples,

Florida until his retirement. Mr. Fiermonte was married to Mary Jane (Jean) Fiermonte for 41 years until her passing.

Mr. Fiermonte is survived by his daughter, Mrs. Mary Smith of NJ; son, Mr. Joseph Fiermonte of Solvay; two grandchildren, Mrs. Jamie Winters of MD and Mr. Michael Fiermonte of Camillus. He is also survived by his brother, Rocco Fiermonte of GA; sisters, Julia Tucciarone and Mattie Peppone of Syracuse; and many nieces and nephews. Funeral services were held on Monday, October 6.

Gene Basara II

GenenLaura@msn.com

Sadly, 1st LT Michael Fisher, Company B, 1st Bat., HH&C, 517th PIR passed away just after midnight on 13 November 2014. He was on the Army's championship pistol team and held a record for rifle at Fort Benning for many years. He is and will be greatly missed by his family and friends. He was a fighter until the end. He was a veteran of Pearl Harbor, The Bulge and Korea.

I always thought of Mike as my "adopted" grandfather. He was living history to me. He always told me the most amazing stories. I believe that Gerald Astor had called him to interview him for the book but Mike declined. He was done with war.

He gave me is Elgin watch, his P38 can opener which he carried since Pearl Harbor, his original escape kit with maps and his original set of orders marked "Top Secret" for when the 517th did their combat jump. He was supposed to destroy them but never got the chance. He kept them all these years.

You might want to send a few kind words to his family.

His daughter Donna's email address is dmthurs@gmail.com

He will be cremated. Saturday, 22 November 2014 will be a mass with an honor guard, flag folding, taps and a gun salute. The church is in Rutland, Vermont.

Regards,
Gene

Fred Duel Waites, Sr, 90, a resident of Trussville, Al., passed away Sunday, September 28, 2014. Funeral services were held Thursday, October 9, 2014 at Cain's Chapel United Methodist Church, Deatsville, AL.

Mr. Waites is survived by three sons, Fred Waites (Kathy) Trussville, AL, Russ Waites, Baton Rouge, LA, Jeff Waites (Lora Leigh), Birmingham, AL, six granddaughters, and four great-grandchildren.

Mr. Waites was born in Birmingham, AL, before moving to Billingsley, AL, in Autauga County. He was a devoted and loving husband and father to his family. He also served his community as a teacher and Coach of numerous men's and women's sports teams for

over 35 years. His students, athletes and fellow coaches and teachers through the years were a true extended family to him. Mr. Waites served his Country honorably as a paratrooper in World War II and was deployed in many areas of Europe. Most notable were the invasions of France and Italy as well as The Battle of the Bulge.

He is preceded in death by his wife of sixty-six years, Mrs. Ella Madora Waites (Dora), his parents John Fred Waites and Emma Penton Waites, and two sisters, Ruby Doris Weldon and Ollie Dean Waites.

Daniel W. Jones

grandson of **Doug W. Jones**, who served proudly in the 517th Parachute "C" company.

Better known as "Deacon", my grandfather is currently 98 years old and now residing in a retirement home in Erie, Pennsylvania. His wife, Elizabeth Jones, passed in September of 2012 and within a year he moved from his residence to the retirement home. Up until a month ago Deacon's health was quite well and active. He was still entertaining the crowds with his organ playing as his son, Doug Jones (Jr) would accompany him with the saxophone. Sadly, these past few weeks he has begun to decline, and as family we fear the worse is approaching.

I wanted it to be known to his regiment the current status of his condition, and if there was anyone who remembers Deacon and would like to write to him while we are still blessed to have his presence.

The address to reach him is below:

Fairview Manor

Attn: Douglas W. Jones

900 Manchester Rd, Fairview, PA 16415

He would be absolutely tickled to hear from friends and comrades. Deacon is in wonderful hands as he has loving family and friends constantly close, and any and all correspondence will be read respectfully to him.

I have in my possession some photographs from his time in Europe from 1944-45 and will scan them so that they can be shared on the 517th website.

He has many fond memories of his time in the 517th, and has made enduring

friendships for many many years from those he proudly served with. I thank you all for support, friendship, and for your sacrifice for serving your country so honorably. Thank you Mr. Barrett, and if there is anything else I can do to pass the word, please let me know what I can do to help.

Sincerely,

Daniel W. Jones

110

Court St.

Farmington, ME

04938

TAPS

Richard "Dick" Baysinger

Fred Thomas Beyer

John Brunner

Cecil Doty

Richard John Eaton

Darrell Egner

Frank Fiermonte

Michael Fisher

Gene Frice

Bill Gutbrod

Hoyt Kelley

Homer B. Leonard

Harold Roberts

Fred D. Waites



Le retour de Leo Dean, « libérateur » de La Motte

Engagé dans le 517^e Régiment d'infanterie parachutiste, ce vétéran américain assistait hier à la cérémonie mottoise en l'honneur des alliés. De cette journée historique, il n'a rien oublié

À 80 ans, Leo Dean a le pas, bon poil. A tel point qu'il doit sauter. Hier, en soirée dans le ciel nocturne. A quelques kilomètres à peine de l'endroit où, il y a 70 ans, il atterrit avec ses frères d'armes du 517^e Régiment d'infanterie parachutiste. Une fête à son âge ? « J'ai encore sauté il y a quinze jours. Ça n'a rien de spécial. Ça n'est pas comme ça, c'est mieux que les pilules que il me donne », rétorque le vétéran américain, un brin emphatique. C'est au sud, par la route d'un trait trop violent. Leo Dean s'est donc retrouvé à la cérémonie de la Ferme du Miton, sous un ciel bleu, à écouter les discours des hommes politiques venus lui rendre hommage. A la question « comment vous sentez-vous au point d'âge ? », l'Américain répond : « Très bien, mais un petit peu fatigué en milieu après. J'ai une adresse d'urgence ici ».

Seconde Guerre mondiale sans une égalité. Un succès ? « Je me suis battu, j'ai gagné et j'ai perdu. Avant de repartir, j'ai seulement... ». « J'ai senti en de la chance. »



Leo Dean ne se considère surtout pas comme un héros. A l'évocation de son parachutage au-dessus de La Motte en août 1944, il déclare simplement : « Vétéran jeune ».









517 PRCT Florida Mini Reunion 2015
Ramada Hotel & Inn Gateway, Kissimmee, FL

Reunion Registration Form
Saturday January 17 – Monday January 19
MLK Holiday Weekend

Name _____ Spouse _____

Guest Names _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (Home) _____ Cellphone _____

Unit _____ Arrival Date _____

Registration Fee - \$75.00
(Includes Banquet Dinner and Hospitality Room)

Banquet Dinner:

Prime Rib _____ (# of people)

Chicken Cordon Bleu _____ (# of people)

Fresh Catch of the Day _____ (# of people)

Please send this registration form with your **check made out to**
517 PRCT Reunion by December 20th to:

Claire Giblin
24 Beverly Drive
Hillsborough, N.J.

Phone: 908-963-3528

Email: clairejgib@comcast.net

517 PRCT FLORIDA MINI REUNION, January 2015

WHERE:

Ramada Hotel & Inn Gateway
7470 Hwy 192 West
Kissimmee, FL 34741

800-327-9170

WHEN: January 17 – 19

(Hospitality Room Opens Friday Evening of January 16)

RATES:

A double room is \$65.00, Tower rooms \$75.00. They will provide these rates for the period +/- five days of the actual reunion to allow for early arrivals and stay-overs.

MAKING YOUR RESERVATION:

CALL 800-327-9170

Identify yourself as attending the 517 PRCT Reunion to get this special rate, WHICH INCLUDES BREAKFAST.

SCHEDULE:

The hospitality suite will be open 5pm to 10pm on Friday

10 am to 10 pm on Saturday through Sunday

10 am to 5pm and after dinner on Monday

Registration: Saturday morning

Rides to Services on Sunday can be arranged

Monday: Memorial Service 6:30 - 6:45 pm; Banquet 6:45 – 10pm

Hospitality suite open following the dinner

For further information contact

Claire Giblin, 908-963-3528

Email: clairejgib@comcast.net

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Editor Claire Giblin

Men of the 517thPRCT parachute into Southern France, August 15, 1944

