



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



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

## MailCall No. 2176

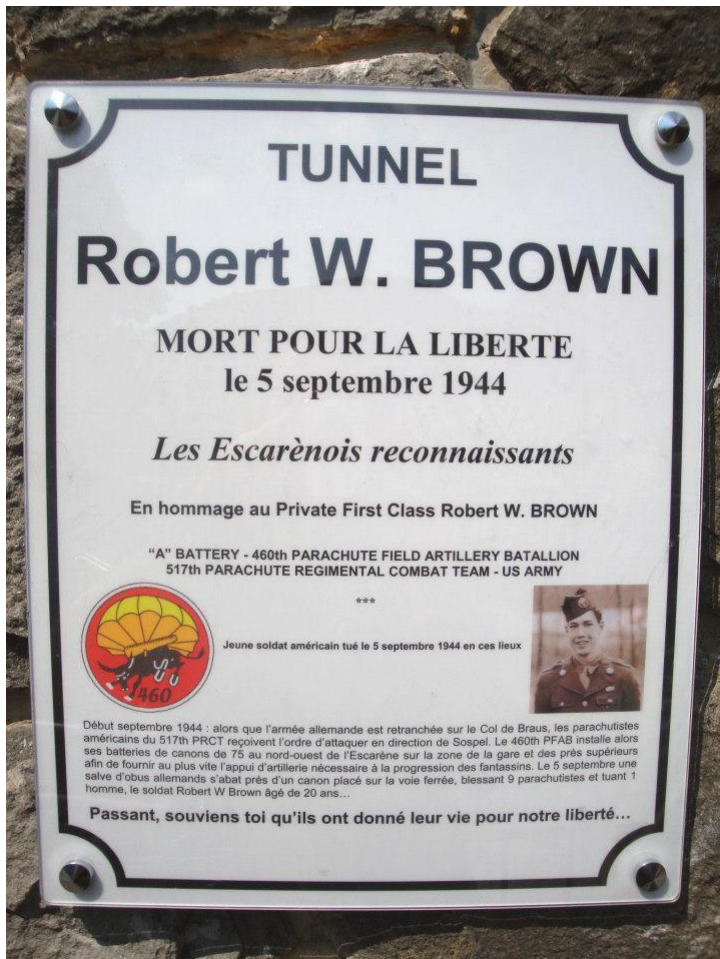
September 8, 2013

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

Website  
Send Mail Call news to  
Mail Call Archives  
2013 Roster (updated!)  
Thunderbolt (Spring 2013)

[www.517prct.org](http://www.517prct.org)  
[MailCall@517prct.org](mailto:MailCall@517prct.org)  
[www.517prct.org/archives](http://www.517prct.org/archives)  
[www.517prct.org/roster.pdf](http://www.517prct.org/roster.pdf)  
[www.517prct.org/archives](http://www.517prct.org/archives)

## Sept 5, 1944 – Pvt. Robert W. Brown - KIA



Plaque apposée en septembre 2009 par l'association "Battle of Col de Braus" en collaboration avec la Mairie de l'Escarène. Les événements ont eu lieu avec la participation de l'association Forty Four Memories

From Sept 2010:

Subject: Tribute to PFC Robert W. Brown A Battery - 460th PFAB killed September, 5th 1944 near l'Escarène Rail-road station

**PFC Robert W. Brown, A Battery - 460th PFAB** (first American soldier killed on our county of l'Escarène).

Since I was a child, my grand-pa Joseph Arnulf (1923-2004) said to me : "a young paratrooper was killed near our field on railroad-station area at beginning of September, 1944, and you owed to honor and remember this man !"

Sincerely,  
**ARNULF Nicolas**  
2418 CH de Montagnac  
06440 L'Escarène – France



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

### ***Hoyt Kelley's Visit to Operation Dragoon Ceremonies***

Dear Mail Call,

I wanted to share a couple of things with you that might be of interest.

As you know, my Dad was in France was for the 517th celebrations -- his first trip to Southern France since the end of the War. He was awarded the French Legion of Honor in Nice on the 28th of August, and following his return, his home town (Providence, Utah) held a big gathering honoring him. The Herald Journal had a nice article on him (see link below).

[http://news.hjnews.com/allaccess/article\\_d739a546-1441-11e3-8021-0019bb2963f4.html](http://news.hjnews.com/allaccess/article_d739a546-1441-11e3-8021-0019bb2963f4.html) (See next page)

Also, in response to the Herald Journal Article, I penned the following Letter to the Editor:

Dear Editor:

I wanted to express my appreciation to the Herald Journal for its fine September 2nd piece on Hoyt Kelley, who received the French Legion of Honor on the 28th of August in Nice, France.

The 517th, one of the most storied special attack forces in the Army, was in many ways the forerunner of today's Army Rangers. Landing in Naples, they fought up the length of Italy, jumped into Southern France, survived the Bulge and fought their way into Germany. At the end of the War the regiment was formally retired, primarily due to a lack of men still standing (they had Europe's highest casualty rate at 89%). Like a lot of WW2 veterans that saw heavy combat, my father never spoke about the war. Until recently, we were not even aware of the many medals he and his unit had been awarded while in the Army.

Having accompanied my father on the trip, I can attest that he is still a trooper in the truest sense. The Legion of Honor is not for wimps, nor by the way, are French awards ceremonies. Imagine being 90-years old and standing at attention for a straight hour under the hot Nice sun. Dad also attended several parades, sitting in an open jeep for two hours or more. And talk about walking -- we averaged 14,000 steps or roughly 7 miles each day (I know, I had a pedometer with me) -- try doing that when you're 90 years old!

When I was a boy, I once asked my Dad what was the primary thing he learned while in the Army. He responded, "I learned how to march." At the age of 90, he still knows how to march -- he just about marched me into the ground.

Highlights of the trip for me included: the French people and the love that they still have for the paratroopers that liberated them; meeting the son of a French freedom fighter who was rescued from the Nazi's when my Dad's unit retook his town; Dad refusing to salute while the British veterans played "God Save the Queen," still a stubborn Irishman to his last breath ("I'm not going to salute for that damn royal family, we fought a revolution to get free of them!"); a parade in Cannes, with thousands of Frenchman along the parade route cheering my Dad; and an old woman in Les Arcs taking my father by the hands, looking into his face and saying "Bravo, Monsieur, Bravo!"

It doesn't get much better than that.

Brian Hoyt Kelley  
Dana Point, California



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

# Providence honors WWII veteran after his return from French medal ceremony

By Amy Macavinta | Posted: Monday, September 2, 2013 8:37 pm



Hoyt Kelley talks with an individual prior to speaking at an event in his honor at Zollinger Park in Providence. Kelly recently returned from France where he was recognized by the French government for his service with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team during World War II. (John Zsiray/Herald Journal)

He is a 90-year-old World War II veteran who was born and raised in a country that values freedom, but it was a recent trip to France that taught him the importance of liberty.

Hoyt Kelley, a current River Heights resident, was one of 2,000 paratroopers with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, and he is one of only 41 still living today.

Each year, during the last two weeks in August, cities throughout southern France that were once occupied by the Germans celebrate their liberation and pay tribute to the Americans who made it happen.

This year, Kelley was one of five U.S. veterans invited to attend the celebrations and the only one to be awarded the Chevalier Legion of Honor, the most prestigious military decoration France has to offer.

This medal was presented to Kelley on Aug. 28 by the mayor of Nice.

On Labor Day morning, less than a day after Kelley's return to Cache Valley, the city of Providence — where Kelley lived for years — also paid tribute to him for his service.

Lanny Nalder once served

on the Providence City Council with Kelley; Nalder introduced Kelley by quoting from Tom Brokaw's book, "The Greatest Generation."

"This is what makes Hoyt Kelley a hero," Nalder said. "They truly did nothing less than save the world."

Kelley is a quiet, reserved man. He reportedly rarely spoke about the war in which he served, not even with his family, over the years.

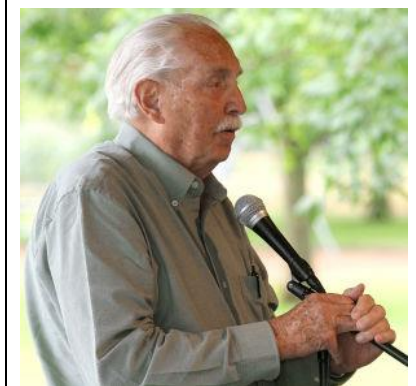
As a young man, Hoyt Kelley was asked to serve a mission for the LDS Church, back when only one missionary left a congregation at one time.

Kelley politely declined. He had two brothers serving the military at the time.

"There's no way I would feel right if I didn't go, too," he said.

Kelley enlisted in the U.S. Army, and his service took him to France, among other places. Kelley was a staff sergeant who served under the infamous Capt. Bill Boyle, gathering military intelligence critical to the unit's mission.

Last month, Kelley returned to the once war-torn region and for three weeks



Hoyt Kelley speaks at an event in his honor at Zollinger Park in Providence. Kelly recently returned from France, where he was recognized by the French government for his service with the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team during World War II. (John Zsiray/Herald Journal)





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

traveled from one city to the next in the order of their liberation. In each city, he was greeted by grateful people eager to share their stories of what liberty meant to them.



Reproduction service medals of Hoyt Kelley sit on a table during an event honoring the Providence resident on Monday morning. (John Zsiray/Herald Journal)

Along the way, he also visited the burial sites of many of his comrades who died there.

“He was able to take us from grave to grave and tell us how each of his friends died,” daughter Kathi Betz said Monday. “And then I understood why he didn’t want to talk about it.”

Kelley said the same scenario played out in each of the cities. He visited the vineyard — once an orchard — where his unit landed when it was dropped into the country. He visited a little Catholic church house where he had once found a flat floor to sleep on after spending many nights sleeping on the steep mountain hillsides. He was approached by elderly residents in the town who actually watched the paratroopers drift down from the sky decades ago.

“We realized something about liberty that we never realized before,” he said. “We’ve never had to live under oppression.”

He toured city after city until he reached Nice, where thousands of

people had gathered.

“I asked my daughter, ‘How in the hell can they have 2,000 people here and do all of this for one person?’” Kelley said.

There, among marching bands, and military officials the mayor presented Kelley with the Chevalier Legion of Honor.

The National Order of the Legion of Honor was an award established in May 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte. “Le Chevalier” is the highest ranking award in that order.

Nalder, after doing some research, said this award isn’t given freely.

“Technically, membership in the Legion is restricted to French nationals only,” he said. “But they make an exception for U.S. veterans who risked their life during World War II to fight on French territory — if they qualify.”

In order to qualify, the veteran must have fought in at least one of four major campaigns to liberate France: Normandy, the Province, the Arden, the Bulge, or Northern France.

A recipient must have the most distinguished service records, must have been decorated with the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, or the Purple Heart, all earned on French territory. Additionally, the recipient must have been wounded or taken prisoner, or taken part in evasive action.

Kelley has been awarded the Bronze Star, three Purple Hearts, and his unit also received a special presidential citation for heroism during the Battle of the Bulge.



The Chevalier Legion of Honor medal that was presented by the mayor of Nice to Providence resident Hoyt Kelley for his service during World War II. The Legion of Honor medal is France's highest distinction. (John Zsiray/Herald Journal)



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

### *Looking for info on Jerry F Wilbur, Jr., I Company*

I don't I don't know If this is even the proper party to address but I got the email address from the 517th prct home page while trying to find information on my grandfather. My name is **Jerry F. Wilbur IV**. My grandfather was Jerry F. Wilbur Jr. I believe he was a member of Company D. I know he was dropped into France and was part of the battle of the bulge. He also has a medal for his part in operation Torch. I don't know any more than that and I would be very grateful to find out any more information. He passed when I was 15 and his son, my father passed when I was eleven. So I never got much of a chance to know of his part in our military history. Anything would be of help. Thank you

**Jerry F Wilbur IV**

---

Hi Jerry,

I will do some digging and put out the word to see if anyone remembers Jerry Wilbur Jr. On a quick look, he shows up in the Christmas 1944 roster as part of **I Company**, temporarily attached to the HQ Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. See: <http://517prct.org/documents/xmas1944/xmas1944.htm>

The 517<sup>th</sup> fought in Italy, was part of Operation Dragoon (the drop into Southern France in August 1944), and the Bulge. They were not part of Operation Torch, but it is possible if he was with another unit at another time.

I haven't found much else yet specifically mentioning Jerry Wilbur Jr., but will keep digging. Understand that the entire 517<sup>th</sup> was a pioneering and very elite paratrooper unit. You can read the entire history of the unit in any of the histories published on the web site: <http://517prct.org/documents.htm>

Bob Barrett

---

Thank you for your swift response. I am so very grateful to receive any information on my grandfather. I very much appreciate your time and effort. I will do some digging with the info you have sent to me and look forward to any other info that is available. Thank you again so much.

Jerry IV

---

You don't have any wartime photos or stories of your grandfather that you can share with us, do you?

As I said, I don't know if any of the remaining troopers from I Company will remember your grandfather personally, but I will put the word out in the next weekly newsletter.

One story you might be interested in is the attack on Manhay on December 27, 1944 by I Company and H Company. Since your granddad was on the Christmas 1944 roster with I Company, I'm sure that he was part of this attack. I know this story well because my dad, **Ben Barrett**, was in H Company, and a good friend **Lud Gibbons** was in I Company. (I was also fortunate to be able to visit Manhay in 2009 with Ben and Lud, shortly before they both passed away.) The short version is that this was an



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

important attack to retake the town of Manhay which was a strategic crossroads held by the Germans. The attack consisted of an artillery barrage followed by the attack from I Company, followed immediately by H Company. Unfortunately, close artillery was called in again while I Company was moving and fell right on the first platoon of I Company, killing about a dozen I Company men and injuring just as many.

Here is the story from *Paratroopers' Odyssey*:

The call came at 1400. The 517th was to attach one battalion to the 7th Armored for the specific purpose of retaking Manhay. The 3rd Battalion\*\* was given the mission. Colonels Graves, Paxton, and Cato reported to the 7th Armored CP, where the general plan of attack was decided and supporting fires were arranged. Colonel Paxton then went on personal reconnaissance while his Battalion moved to an assembly area a mile northwest of Vaux Chavanne.

\*\* Less Company G, plus one platoon of the 596th Engineers and a section of the Regimental demolitions platoon.

Paxton found that the forward positions of the 48th Armored Infantry were almost two miles further north than had been indicated on the 7th Armored Division situation map. This meant that his battalion would have to cross two miles of terrain covered with snow and underbrush, in darkness, before reaching the line of departure.

At Vaux Chavanne Colonel Paxton issued his attack order at 1830. The attack would jump off at 0215 after a ten-minute TOT by eight battalions of artillery. The formation would be column of companies, I leading, H following. The line of departure was just west of Vaux Chavanne, a thousand yards northeast of Manhay. The Battalion machine guns were attached to the rifle companies, and bazooka teams were to be well forward.

No other battalion of the 517th had the experience of the 3rd in closely following massed artillery. Lessons learned at Les Arcs and Tete de la Lavina were now to be put to use. With two companies, the 3rd Battalion was going to take on what appeared to be a reinforced battalion of SS Panzer Grenadiers -- a fair match.

After issuing his attack order Colonel Paxton, accompanied by Colonel Graves, set up his forward CP in a ruined building just west of Vaux Chavanne. At 0100 the 3rd Battalion left its assembly area, arriving in the attack position about 45 minutes later. As they formed on the line of departure Paxton joined them, and at 0200 the artillery concentrations began. Over 5,000 rounds were fired in four concentrations, one directly upon Manhay and three on its southern approaches.

At 0215, five minutes after the artillery lifted, Captain Jim Birder's I Company moved out. Colonel Paxton, apparently feeling that the time required to reach the village would allow the Germans to man their positions, called for a repeat of the artillery. The fire came in promptly, but one salvo landed directly upon Lieutenant Stott's platoon, which was leading I Company\* and nine others were killed and several wounded. Despite this tragedy, I Company pressed on with Lieutenant Dick Jackson's H Company close behind, firing bazookas, throwing white phosphorous grenades, and shooting anything that moved. The Germans were stunned by the artillery fire and caught off-balance by the speed and violence of the attack. In fifteen minutes half the town was cleared and by 0330 the last pocket of resistance was eliminated.



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

\* Whether this tragic accident was due to the artillery landing short, or the troopers advancing too soon -- or both -- will never be known. In any event, it is certain that by following the artillery closely the 3rd Battalion took far fewer casualties than would otherwise have been the case.

Approximately 50 Germans were killed and 29 captured.\*\* One enemy tank and several other armored vehicles had been destroyed. The 3rd Battalion suffered 24 casualties, including ten dead. Almost all had been the victims of supposedly friendly artillery fire. The enemy were identified as members of the 3rd and 4th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiments of the 2nd SS Panzer Division.

\*\* More prisoners might have been taken, but the 3rd Battalion had just returned from the Malmedy area where it had seen and heard of the results of the massacre of American prisoners. After Malmedy it was not easy for an SS man to surrender .

In 2003, at one of the 517<sup>th</sup> reunions, a group of I and H Company troopers did an audio interview recalling the Manhay attack. This hour-long interview is at: <http://517prct.org/audiovideo/ManhayDiscussion060403.wma>

Regards,

Bob Barrett

Thank you Bob for all the info and links you have provided me with. Anything is helpful and greatly appreciated. I don't really have much as far as stories and/or pics of him in the military. Like I said I was young he only ever told me and the other grandchildren very little of his military exploits. The funny stuff that he figured we could handle I guess. One thing is he often told me about being dropped into France and he landed on a roof and crashed through and got stuck half inside and half out. He used his rifle but to beat himself loose and climb out.

Not much detail but one I have cherished him telling.

When you put the word out maybe some information could be useful. He went to Duke where he met my grandmother, Jinx Sellers. He proposed to her in a telegraph from Europe. I believe he was 23 when joining. Was an only child. Upon his return to the states he lived in Madisonville Kentucky where he father 3 girls and 1 boy. In the late 70s early 80s he moved to Arizona where he purchased The Fourr Ranch, S. of Tucson in (get this) the Dragoon Mtns. Went from op dragoon to the dragoon Mtns. Ironical. He ran a cattle ranch there along with participation on the board of directors for First Citizens national Bank. He also had some Coca Cola bottling and distribution factories across the south when my father was a child.

I don't know if any of that will help in any way but thought if anything you would at least like to get more info on one of the soldiers.

I and my cousins are extremely grateful for your help and effort. I look forward to checking my mail very much the past few days. I will do research on him and the rest of his comrades and keep you posted on what if anything I find about him. Thank you again so very much and I hope you have an excellent day.

Jerry F Wilbur IV





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

### *Other MailCall News*

Hi Bob, We still are not getting the Mail Call. What has happened? Please put Myrle back on the mail list.

Thanks,  
**Betty and Myrle Travers**

At this point, most of the MailCall delivery issues seem to have resolved. I have heard from a couple of people that they are not getting MailCall, but I think the issues are only with a few email systems (cox.net, nycap.rr.com). I think the problems are on the receiving side. If your email has a blacklist, make sure that [MailCall@517prct.org](mailto:MailCall@517prct.org) is not in the blacklist. Also check your spam folders.

If you know of anyone who is not getting MailCalls weekly, let me know. I am sending out a few with "special personal delivery".

Bob Barrett

### *Steve Gomez Jumps at the 69<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Dragoon*

On August 13<sup>th</sup> I had the honor of jumping into the same area that my father **CPL Ben Gomez of B Battery 460<sup>th</sup>** did on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 1944.

By way of a generous invitation from the French Airborne Command group led by **Stephane Hadjadj** to the Airborne Demonstration Team we were able to join forces and honor those that led the way into the invasion of Southern France in Operation Dragoon.

Here I am with my buddy Tom Boyle (on right) enroute to the DZ. We timed our efforts back home so this would be the 100<sup>th</sup> jump for both of us!







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



The jump platform was a French Noratlas that is very similar a US C-119 "Flying Boxcar".

On the DZ and celebrating with **Alan and Leo** with some Champagne (of course!).

**Howard Hayes** is assisting in holding up the guidon and this jump was very special to him as his Great **Uncle CPL Melvin Cory** was also in B Battery with my dad and they jumped together as well in '44!

The guidon belongs to **SGT Fred Brown of HQ Battery 460<sup>th</sup>** and has made its second jump into Southern France!



**SGT Brown** is past President of the 517<sup>th</sup> association and lives in Port Arthur, Texas.

Fred Brown wearing the beret that my friend Tom Boyle gave to him.



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



My wife Leah was able to attend and we had a very special time enjoying the hospitality and beautiful countryside of Provence!

We finally got to meet some good friends in person, **Nicolas Arnulf** from L'Escarene and Tim Bell from the UK.

I am sitting down with **Nicolas Arnulf** who is heading up the "Battle of Col De Braus" celebrations next month.

B battery set up their guns in his grandfather's front yard in the campaign toward Sospel!



The last photo is of Mr. Art Helmers of the 602<sup>nd</sup> FAB who arrived in gliders with their pack howitzers.

Next to him is my friend Tim Bell who is a 75mm pack howitzer expert and owns two of them as well!

What a privilege it was to be a part of these events! AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY!

**Steve Gomez**







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

## *Just for Laughs*

### Bayonet Training

It was an extremely hot day and the sergeant in charge of bayonet drill for the paratroopers was trying hard to get his listless men to attack the stuffed dummies with more energy. Finally he halted the drill and said: "Listen, men, those dummies are your enemy. They have burned your houses and killed your parents. They carried away your sisters, stole all your money and drank all of the whiskey in the house."

The sergeant then stepped back and motioned the paratroopers forward toward the row of dummies. The line surged ahead with new purpose. The troopers with grim looks on their faces showed eagerness to attack.

One paratrooper, his eyes stern and his lips, drawn back over his teeth in a snarl, paused to ask: "Sergeant, which one drank the whiskey?"

## *Administrivia*

- If you miss any MailCalls, they are all available online at <http://www.517prct.org/mailcall/>
- At any time, if you want to be added or removed from the MailCall list, just let me know.
- Send any news, stories, or feedback to: [MailCall@517prct.org](mailto:MailCall@517prct.org)
- If you send me email that you do not want included in MailCall, just label it as FYEO.
- I now understand how Ben could get confused about what he already posted and what he didn't. If I miss something, please just send it again.
- Donations for any programs involving the 517th should be sent to our new Association Treasurer: Identify the purpose of any donation (Annual Donations, In Memory of... etc.) and make all checks payable to:

### **517 PRCT Association, Inc.**

c/o Joanne Barrett  
70 Pleasant Street  
Cohasset, MA 02025

