



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2220

June 29, 2014

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

Website
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2013 Roster (updated!)
Thunderbolt (Winter 2014)

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MailCall News

St. Joseph, Gilmour football coach Bill Gutbrod was an American war hero

By Mark Podolski, The News-Herald , Sunday, June 22, 2014

As much as the late Bob Feller was known as an American hero as one of baseball's all-time greatest pitchers for the Indians, he's equally revered as a United States war hero. The same should be said about the late Bill Gutbrod, whose 310 career coaching victories as football coach for St. Joseph and Gilmour from 1950 to 1997, are an area best. On June 27 at The News-Herald Senior Bowl, Gutbrod, who died in 2012 at age 87, will be inducted in the 2014 N-H High School Sports Hall of Fame.

He'll go in as a football coach, but that's only half the story of Gutbrod's life.

After entering the military, Gutbrod joined the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, a unit that was formed in 1943 and trained at Camp Toccoa, Ga. The unit's first combat jump was Operation Dragoon in Southern France in August 1944. Following the liberation of France, the 517th joined forces with the 82nd Airborne Division and fought with it in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, fought from Dec. 16, 1944 to Jan. 25, 1945.

The 517th suffered heavy casualties during the fighting. In its five campaigns during World War II, the 517th reportedly had 1,576 casualties, and 247 men killed in action. Gutbrod was a survivor.

"As I got older, Dad told me stories about watching a lot of his friends die," Gutbrod's son, Chip, said. "The war made him tough, but there was a lot of pain too."

John Storey, VASJ's current football coach and longtime assistant to Gutbrod, said the former coach was sprayed with shrapnel during the Battle of the Bulge and the remnants remained in Gutbrod's body the rest of his life.

For his heroic World War II acts, Gutbrod was given a Bronze Star, the fourth-highest military award.

"A lot of kids these days don't know what guys like Bill went through," said Storey. "But it's important to know what so many of these guys went through. It's important when you see a veteran to tell them thank you."

From: <http://www.news-herald.com/sports/20140622/mark-podolski-late-st-joseph-gilmour-football-coach-bill-gutbrod-was-an-american-war-hero>





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*Last week, I included the story of the first combat battles of the 517th in Italy, June 1944. Coincidentally, I then received this note regarding **John Hosbach**, C Company, who was KIA in one of those battles. – BB*

Subject: WWII soldier information

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.

Robert & Angela Hosbach

Hi Rob,

I haven't found a photo in my records, most of which are on the website. I think I know which group photo you are referring to, the one from Toccoa (http://517prct.org/photos/c_co_toccoa.htm) which lists Hosbach and a few others at the top. You see in that photo that KIA or W (wounded?) is written on the photos. I was thinking that the notes at the top don't necessarily mean that Hosbach was not in the photo, but rather that Buck Miller just might not be able to identify Hosbach by sight.

We do know that Hosbach was killed in Italy in the first set of battles by the 517th. I have attached a copy of the Morning Report for June 25 which lists him as wounded but not KIA. My guess is that he died of the resulting wounds.

I will post your request to the next 517th newsletter, and let you know if anyone remembers Hosbach.

Bob Barrett

Thank you so much. I (Angie) have been searching your website off & on for the past 2 years hoping to find something about John for my husband. We do have several papers showing his status, but did not have the one you sent. We finally received a picture of his grave @ the Florence-American Cemetery just a few weeks ago from someone that helps fulfill photo grave-site requests (Find-A-Grave).

We are still searching in earnest for any photos. I will have Rob look over the Company photo again, in case he can identify John--we had just assumed he wasn't in it because of the notes written there.

Unfortunately, we have no photos of him at all & it has been so long! Trying to also make contact with some distant relatives that may have gotten family photos passed on to them. If we get any of him from his time enlisted I will be sure to pass them on to you for the 517th site.

Thank you so much for your continued efforts.

God Bless - **Angela (& Robert) Hosbach**



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Hi Lory,

I received my Spring issue of the Thunderbolt today and noticed that the address is incorrect. You have my street address as 226 Valley Dr, Toccoa GA 30577

It should be 266 Valley Dr, Toccoa GA 30577

I enjoyed reading another issue of the Thunderbolt very much. I noticed that you were in Toccoa last year for the recognition of the 70th year of the 517th PRCT. I was at the ceremony at the old Camp Toccoa site beside the old Mess Hall building and gave a short talk about the history of Camp Toccoa. I am sorry I didn't get to meet you and get acquainted with you.

I am the person that brought the paratroopers back to Toccoa for the first time after WW II.

About 1989 my brother-in-law and I raised the funds to erect the Camp Toccoa Monument at the site. I organized a Camp Toccoa Reunion and dedication of the monument which took place Nov. 17-18, 1990.

We probably had about 300 veterans back for that event and I got acquainted with several of them. I remember **Bill Lewis**, **Roy Landreth** and **Malcolm Evans** best. The 517th came back twice after that for reunions and I was able to do a little ground work for them in holding their reunions in Toccoa. Fond memories.

Best regards to you and others involved with the Thunderbolt,

Lamar Davis

266 Valley Dr.
Toccoa GA 30577

Bob: Claire's letter and your maps make me wish Alan and I could join President Johnson, Claire, Mimsey et al for the 70th Anniversary of the Southern Invasion. This Mail Call brings to the fore such clear memories from Alan's and my trip with Dad to walk his battlefields in 2005. Seems like yesterday. Such treasured memories. We will never be able to say thank you enough to all those who made the trip to southern France and to Belgium a special trip of a life time. How blessed the group going in August will be by the generous hospitality they will experience.

Pat Seitz

My dad (**Stanley Pietrucki**, Reg. HQ) was an airborne veteran and hence subscribed to the Thunderbolt. After his passing my mom continued to subscribe to the newsletter. She passed away in August 2013 and I (their daughter) am in the process of cleaning out their house. I came upon a few of Thunderbolt and was not sure if she is still on your mailing list. If so, can you please discontinue sending any future copies? Here is her name and address: Elizabeth Pietrucki, West Palm Beach, FL

Thank you.
Patricia Economidis



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Sirs,

I am a french man working on the story of my village during the world war2 working in the archives, I have found a letter send to the mayor of Les Arcs by an american soldier after the war this soldier is **Bill Nickerson**, his adress was 206 monticello avenue Jersey city, New Jersey he was in medical corps of the 517th parachute combat team.drop on les Arcs the 15/08/1944 In this letter he thanks a woman named Madame Georges Giraud who help him to escape to germans soldiers, and a man named Monsieur De Laval who served as interpreter and help him to reach his régiment in La Motte.

May be Bill Nickerson is still alive or if he is not may be he have always some family in Jersey city or New Jersey.

Can you hep me to make a research because I want obtain a picture of him for a next exposition this year in august.

I thank you for your help

Franck DUGAS
330 ROUTE DU CIMETIERE
83460 LES ARCS SUR ARGENS
FRANCE

[Does anyone remember Bill Nickerson of the Medical Detachment? – BB]

hello

i,am john van der steen and i have adopted the grave of **henry a woehrer** 517th h company serial number 36827313 at henri chapelle in belgium.

you have a great site bud i can not find anything of henry a woehrer if jou have information please share it with me

with friendly regards john van der steen

lets we forget

Thanks much for the info (I apologize for the delay in sending this) Please find a picture of Uncle Henry attached.

Charles Bronson

[Henry Woehrer was KIA in Stavelot.]





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Hello Bob and all

I was hoping that I could communicate this out on the next MailCall

My Grandfather is celebrating his 90th birthday, and I would like to invite any trooper or family member in the Pacific Northwest to come celebrate this momentous occasion with our family.

The particulars are as follows:

Sunday, September 21, 2014 12:45 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Emeritus at Harbour Pointe Shores
1020 Catala Avenue SE
Ocean Shores, WA 98569

Our family and the facility will be providing cake, coffee, and treats. The family is not asking for gifts. Your presence is more than enough.

Ocean Shores is a fantastic location for a weekend getaway in late summer. If you need assistance with booking lodging or accommodations, I would be more than happy to assist. Please contact me at scott@ross-wa.net if you are interested.

Thanks and hope to see you there.

Scott Ross

Grandson of **Norman L. Ross Jr.**
I Co. 3rd Battn. 517th PIR



I don't know if I ever provided you with a summary of events that took place during a return trip to Europe in 1989. I had completely forgotten about the file until Bob Dalrymple called me on June 19th to tell me it was his 97th birthday and he was going to live to be 100. I then remembered that he gave some remarks at the presentation of a plaque for mounting at the entrance to the Nice Airport. The plaque was honoring the six men from the 596th who lost their lives removing mines at the airport.

Merle Mc Morrow



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Merle McMorrow's European Trip Report - 1989

REPORT OF RETURN TRIP TO EUROPE-1989

After returning home from service I wouldn't see any European countries again for 45 years. Members of our 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team had planned for a number of years to return to the areas where we had fought 45 years earlier in Italy, France, Belgium and Germany.

My wife Kay was already having some major health problems and I opt not to go. She insisted I go and we arranged with a local hospital to have her hooked into a monitoring system whereby she could alert or call for help with the press of a button.

We were scheduled to leave from John F. Kennedy Airport for Brussels on October 5, 1989. I left Bismarck the day before in case I missed plane connections somewhere along the way. There was no refund if I wasn't there to board the plane when it left for Brussels. I arrived at JFK at 6:00 p.m. on October 4th and spent the night in the terminal. My sons made fun of me for years because I didn't get a motel for the night. I was unfamiliar with the large city and I was reluctant to get too far away from the terminal since this increased my chances of being unavailable at flight time. It might have been different if I was a part of a group. By staying in the terminal I knew I was at the point of departure.

I met a Polish fellow who had been visiting in New Orleans. Neither one of us could speak the other's language but we got along just fine. I told him I had attended a soccer match in a large stadium in Warsaw. My only complaint was that no matter where you sat in the stadium you were always behind a Pole. I don't know if he got the joke or not.

There were a number of homeless people in the terminal but they were kept on the lower level. Passengers with tickets could be on second level where the gates were. This was long before all the security measures were necessary such as we have now.

Early the next morning a few familiar faces began to show up from all over the country and I felt a little better. It was like the feeling one has after a combat jump during the dark of night and you run into the first familiar face. A sense of relief sets in. We gathered at a central location (snack bar) and then left on Sebeana Airlines at 7:30 P.M. Diner and breakfast was served during the overnight flight. We arrived in Brussels at 7:00 A.M. local time. Seventy-five men and women made the trip. Jack Dunaway, who had gone over a few days earlier, welcomed us at the airport with a "picket" sign which said, "Go Home 517, we remember you from 1944." The reverse side said, WELCOME BACK DADDY. The local Belgian people at the airport enjoyed the reception we got.

Two tour guides from American Express also met us. After we cleared customs, we were loaded on two large buses and taken to the Ramada Inn in Liege. It was a 70-minute ride from Brussels through beautiful countryside. The highway had lighting standards every 100 feet in the median for the entire distance between the two cities.

Our rooms were not ready when we arrived, so we took a walking tour around Liege. Most of us crashed into bed at 4:30 P.M. European Time. With the exception of one hour on the plane, I had been awake for 54 hours.



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The streets of Liege were stacked with garbage and littered with paper. Someone told us the city was bankrupt. Prices were high. A cup of coffee was \$1.40 and if you wanted a warm-up, it was a \$1.40.

We walked through a large carnival area in the center of town. We were told the carnival would remain for the entire summer every year. The weather was damp, cold, and lacking in sunshine. It was typical fall weather for that part of the continent.

We left the hotel at 8:30 A.M. On October 7th and went to Pont d' Erezee where we met Mr. Leon Delvaux and Mrs. Fontaine. They served as our guides until later in the afternoon when we met Leo Carlier and his wife Francine at Trois Ponts.

We stopped in the city of Hotton at 9:30 A.M. A reception was held in the Municipal Hall. Our **Colonel Boyle** presented a 517th plaque to the mayor and the mayor presented an inscribed plate to the 517th.

One farmer was questioning everyone to see if anyone knew a soldier named Shields. A German tank, which had been knocked off the road, rolled down an embankment. Parts of the tank were dismantled and salvaged over a seven-year period. When the tank was completely removed, the remains of an American soldiers were found. The Belgian had information that showed the soldier's name was Shields. He was hoping some of us could clear up the mystery that had bothered him for so many years. He was told we would follow up with the military in Washington when we returned home.

We were served a prepared lunch in Hotton and then went on to St. Jacques where we visited a 517th memorial. A wreath was placed by **Leo Turco** and **Richard Tallakson** and a small ceremony conducted. Many small villages have monuments to designate where 2 or 3 men fell during the liberation of their village. Flowers are placed by the locals on special days.

One monument we visited listed 45 Belgian people who had been shelled by American artillery. Five were killed. A man standing by the plaque was 5 years old at the time. His father had just stepped out of the house to get something and was killed by the shelling. He said he understood and was not bitter because there were many Germans in the area at the time.

We then went on to Rochelival and were 45 minutes late. All the town people were standing in the rain and waiting. A memorial was presented in honor of the Belgian patriots who had assisted us during this period in 1944. Many tears were shed. All the old veterans were proud with their medals pinned to their suits. A local honor guard was present for the ceremony.

At 3:00 P.M., we stopped at a monument placed on the side of a hill next to the highway in honor of paratroops from the 551st Battalion. A picture of the major who led the attack was on the monument. He started his attack with 790 men and four days later 110 were left. One lieutenant and two sergeants were in command.

The highlight of the day was the dedication of a memorial we place in the village of Wanne. It was dedicated to the Belgian people who assisted us during the war. After unveiling, flowers were placed and a history of the work connected with the monument was given.

We then returned by bus to Trois Ponts for a reception and an hour of friendly wine. We returned to the hotel in Liege after a day of cool, rainy weather.



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We left the hotel the next morning at 9:00 A.M. on October 8th after a continental breakfast. The coffee was strong, but diluted with fifty- percent cream. It was a cold, Sunday morning as we headed for Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery. There are 7,989 known Americans buried there and the pylons contain the names of 450 who were never found or identified.

We held a Service at the Chapel. A wreath was placed on the altar and then **Cameron Gauthier** recited an opening prayer. Our Association Secretary **Bill Lewis** read the 40 names of our Combat Team that are resting at the Cemetery. **Bob Dalrymple** had a closing prayer. After the Memorial Service, we spent some time visiting individual gravesites of our buddies. Belgians who visit the cemetery on holidays and weekends with floral arrangements have adopted all graves.

We had lunch in a cafeteria Leo found for us and then we traveled to the monument erected in memory of the 85 prisoners shot at Malmedy by German SS troops. A group of green army artillery personnel was captured at a crossroads. The Belgians have built a long wall with the names of those killed inscribed on plaques attached to the wall. At the end of the wall, a small altar exists.

We then went to the mayor's office in St. Vith for friendship wine. **Jim Benton** presented a plaque to the mayor. I was beginning to think that if we had many more receptions to attend, I should apply for my AA membership

We then traveled to Vielsom and Parker's Cross Road. A monument has been erected near the crossroad and is maintained by the local Lions Club. A Lt. Parker and a number of stragglers held up the German advance for three hours at this point. The crossroad was named in honor of the lieutenant.

We moved to Manhay late in the afternoon for a reception hosted by the City Council. Another ceremony was held on the grass near a stone monument in front of the city office building. The reception was held in an adjacent highway maintenance building. These towns and villages were small and the ceremonies held there by returning American veterans was very important to them. It was recorded in their city records as a historic event.

We returned to the hotel at 7:00 P.M. It had been another cold and rainy day.

On Monday, October 9th, we left the hotel at 9:00 A.M. and went to the museum at Le Gleize. It contains a display of both German and American items of World War II. Out in front of the Museum stands the only German Tiger Tank left in Belgium. Sal Icontro presented a plaque for display in the museum.

We then traveled to Stavelot where we met the mayor at the bridge spanning the Ambleve River. A small ceremony was held and Charley Pugh presented a plaque to the mayor. We spent about an hour walking around Stavelot before leaving for Logbierme at 2:00 P.M.

Five men were killed at a crossroad in Logbierme trying to hold a bridge. A safe in a building located upstream from the bridge was blown later during the battle. A box of jewels were suppose to have been thrown in the river from this bridge by Americans who hoped to later retrieve them. Members of the Provost Office were looking for members of our outfit who were from New York or Chicago. The job was so good; it was assumed it was done by professionals. The Belgians had erected a monument to the five men at the crossroad and we stopped there for a ceremony.

Another man from the village erected his own monument in a location where he, as a five-year old, had seen two unarmed Americans and three civilians killed by Germans. He told us he had a son as



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exchange student in Stockton, California. The son was returning home in two months. Everyone was extremely friendly and wherever we stopped there was friendship wine and high cholesterol desserts.

At 3:30 P.M. we were invited to a reception the 3rd Regimental Chasseurs Ardennais Officers' Mess. We toured their facility, which must have been similar to one of our National Guard Units. They were considered one of the best regiments guarding the frontier in 1940. After a parting glass of wine, we left for Val D' Ambleve Restaurant in Coo.

The stop in Coo would be our Farewell Dinner in Belgium. We spent five hours over dinner. After an excellent dinner, we presented gifts to our guides and thanked them for their help and assistance during our visit. One lady at the dinner did spy work for our unit during the war.

We were up at 7:00 A.M. on Tuesday, October 10th. After breakfast we boarded buses for Brussels. Later that morning we left Brussels for Nice, France on Sebena Airlines. We arrived in Nice at 1:30 P.M. and checked into the Atlantic Hotel which was located a few blocks from the beach. The rest of the day was spent just sightseeing in town. Not much had changed since we had been there 45 years earlier. The barricades the Germans had placed on the streets fronting on the beach had all been removed. I went to look at the hotel I had stayed in a number of times while I was on leave in 1944. A large park near the beach has a river running beneath it. I hadn't remembered that; evidently it was an open stream with bridges over it when I had last seen it. It seemed strange how the years disappeared as I stood looking at familiar sights. I felt 21 years old again.

We were up at 7:00 A.M. on October 11th and, after breakfast a half-hour later, we loaded on buses.

We were on our way to Draguignan to visit the Rhone American Cemetery located there. **Fred Brown** **Mike Bulino** laid a wreath at the monument in the cemetery. Forty-two men from our unit are interred in the cemetery. It is small with only 861 buried there. There are men from every State in the Union except North Dakota. There are 62 "unknown" headstones and a "wall of missing" with 293 names for those who died in action, but their remains were never found.

We went to La Motte for a ceremony and the placing of a wreath at the Airborne Memorial by **John Fraser** and **Burton Meador**. Fraser presented Mayor Rose with a 517th plaque.

We had lunch in Le Muy at 1:15 at the town hall. It was a 5-course meal and took two hours to finish. After lunch, **H.G. Lawrence** placed a wreath and **J.K. Horne** presented the mayor with a plaque.

We then went to Les Arcs where we were welcomed by Mayor Rene Meissonnier. A wreath was placed by **Eugene Mars** and **James Royer**. **Col. Bill Boyle** presented a plaque to the mayor.

At 5:30 P.M., we visited Chateau Ste. Roseline, which was our Regimental Command Headquarters after the jump into France. The Chateau had been built in the year 1205. It had been in the family for over 200 years. We were greeted by Baron de Rasque de Laval who took us on a tour of the winery. It was the height of the wine season and they were in the process of wine making. The Baron's father, who had been operating the winery in 1944, died in 1984. The present operator was in the French Air Force during the war. After a period of wine tasting, we returned to our hotel at 8:00 P.M.

On Thursday, October 12th, we assembled in front of the Luceram City Hall and were welcomed by the mayor. Luceram is a small mountain village located to the northwest of Nice. We strolled to the city monument located at the south end of town where **Jim Benton** and **Bill Westbrook** placed a



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wreath. We then returned to a reception at the city hall where **Merle Mc Morrow** presented Mayor Noat with a plaque.

It was quite a coincident, that while we were in Luceram, a woman came up to us and wanted to know if **Major Laval** was with us. She then told us she went into labor during a German shelling on October 12th (45 years to the day). Major Laval, head of our medical unit, took care of her during a very difficult birth and had saved both her and the baby's lives. She had a letter she wanted to present to the Major. When we told her the Major had died a few years prior, the tears streamed down her face. The lady gave us a picture of her son who had been delivered on that day. He had been killed in an auto accident in 1980.

We assembled in the parking lot at l' Escarene where we were welcomed by Mayor Cordon. **Don Pargeon** and **Sal Incontro** placed wreaths at the War Memorial and the Mausoleum. As at all previous ceremonies, both National Anthems were played. We had lunch in the hotel at l' Escarene which had also been a Regimental Command Post in 1944. The large bridge crossing the valley near the hotel had the center span rebuilt. The Germans had blown out a 100-section as they retreated in 1944.

We then traveled a winding road up the mountain to Col de Braus. It was the pass over the top before dropping back down toward the sea. At the top was a small restaurant called Buvette du Col de Braus. We presented the owner Antoine Migone with one of our plaques to display in his restaurant. He had been a former inmate of Buchenwald Concentration Camp. We spent an hour in the area looking at some of the concrete bunkers the Germans had built and also picking up pieces of shrapnel. The south end of the Maginot Line was only a few miles from where we were located and the Germans used the French guns to fire on this area.

We dropped down the curving mountain road into the town of Sospel located near sea level. We were welcomed by Mayor Gianotti in the town square where the war monument was located. **Sal Incontro** and **James Royer** laid a wreath at the base of the monument. We then went in the mayor's office for friendship wine. During the reception we were presented with medals by Jean Pierre Domerego. Freddie Scotto gave us French parachute wings and red berets.

We then took the highway through Mentone back to Nice. It was the highway Princess Grace of Monte Carlo was traveling when she was killed. A beautiful view of Monte Carlo is provided by driving on the mountainside highway. We arrived at the hotel at 8:00 P.M. tired and ready for bed.

We planned to place a plaque at the entrance to the Nice Airport on Friday, October 13th. Six engineers had been killed removing about 2,500 land mines the Germans had place at the airport. **Bob Dalrymple**, who was in charge of the Engineer Company, gave the following remarks at the dedication of the plaque honoring the men:

Bonjour Mesdames et Messieurs

"As we landed at the Nice Airport Tuesday afternoon, my mind was flooded with memories and thoughts of a few fateful days in September, 1944.

The 596th Engineers, the Engineer Company of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team, had been ordered to clear the Nice Airport of German mines and fortifications so that it could be used by allied aircraft.



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The task was hazardous and, as I recall, of high priority. As Company Commander, I assigned the mission to the 3rd Platoon, which moved to the vicinity of the Airport on 15, September.

For those of you unfamiliar with the happenings, I offer a brief review of the operation. The Germans had prepared the Airport for defense against assault by land, sea, or air, and especially so from attack from the sea. There was an anti-tank wall approximately 3,000 feet long on the seaward side, which was constructed of heavy, steel-reinforced concrete. Numerous pillbox type, anti-aircraft heavy concrete gun emplacements existed (Flak Towers), all properly sited to deny avenues of approach to and on the field. Additionally, in the ground, buried two feet deep, were hundreds of anti-tank mines (Telermine), interspersed with all types of anti-personnel mines; and too many mines were "booby-trapped".

The general procedure for mine clearing and demolition was to excavate, usually by hand, a Tellermine, deactivate its detonator, remove the mine from the ground and then use a number of mines as high explosives to demolish the seawall and Flak Towers.

For several days the operation proceeded as planned. The pattern of how the mines were laid had to be established, and using the mines as high explosives required experimentation to determine how much damage a given number would do when used on heavy concrete structures.

On 18 September, a truck loaded with mines was about to be unloaded so that the mines could be used to blow down a Flak Tower. For reasons unknown, the load exploded resulting in the death of the six soldiers working on the load. The cause of the tragedy has never been determined.

It is a lasting tribute to the courage and bravery of these men that they continue and completed the mission on 11 October, 45 years and two days ago.

And so with heavy hearts but great respect for these brave soldiers we here, now, dedicate this memorial plaque in their honor, and in eternal remembrance of those six men who made the ultimate sacrifice on this battlefield."

The ceremony was covered by French Television and newspapers. **Bill Hudson** was interviewed by Dieter Friedrich for Radio Free Europe.

We were up at 5:00 A.M. on October 14th to catch an 8:00 A.M. train to Rome. A number of fellows left us at Nice and either went to England or returned home. It was a relaxing and pleasant trainride along the seashore. Every previous day had been busy and crowded with activities. It was nice to just sit back and enjoy the scenery. We had been warned to be aware of pickpockets if we moved about the train. However, one fellow still became a victim.

We arrived in Rome at 6:00 P.M. and we were in the Fleming Hotel by 7:00 o'clock. A number of us at a small restaurant near the hotel and then went to bed. I could feel a cold coming on all day and I had a fever most of the night.

Sunday morning we were on our own. However, there was a tour of Rome available and many of us took it. We went to the King Victor Immanuel Memorial, the Vatican, and many of the Roman ruins. The Italians were in the process of restoring many of the old ruins. Their money could be better spent correcting some of their traffic problems. No such things as parking lots or ramps existed. Anywhere an open area existed, including sidewalks, it became a parking spot.



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On Monday, October 16th, we traveled to the Lago Albano-Frascati area. The Pope's summer home is located in the heights above the lake. It was our staging area before leaving for Southern France in 1944. We had coffee in a small sidewalk cafe on the shore of the lake. Many memories of the five-mile run from the olive grove near Frascati to Lake Albano were refreshed. After a short swim, we would return to our pup tents, passing many Tokay grape vineyards on the way back.

After leaving the lake, we traveled to Castel Gondolfo. The city was built on the side of a cliff and seemed much higher now than it did in 1944. A number of our group walked to the top.

We had lunch at Illmanero where an Italian wedding reception was being held. We livened up the reception and I am sure the bride and groom will always remember those crazy Americans who happened to be at the same restaurant where their reception was held. After lunch, we went into Frascati to roam around. The area where our tents were in 1944 is now filled with homes and streets. Before leaving the town and returning to our hotel in Rome, we presented a plaque to the mayor.

On Tuesday, October 18th, we left for Civitavecchia, Grosseto, Gavarano, and other towns north of Rome that had been a part of our lives during those few brief weeks in June 1944. We had lunch inside a 1500 A.D. wall, which had encircled the old city. After lunch, we went up to Gavarano where a plaque was presented to the mayor. Evidently no military veterans of World War II had ever visited his village. Great excitement resulted and he had a number of city officials assembled in the City Square. It was pleasing to see how gratified they were that their city was remembered. We had a farewell dinner at the hotel when we returned that evening. We were scheduled to return to Brussels the next day.

We left Rome at 12:15 P.M. on October 18th and arrived in Brussels two hours later. We passed over the rugged mountains of Switzerland. It was a perfectly clear day and the cities of Geneva and Lausanne were easily recognized lying next to the lake. A minor incident occurred as we were making our final approach into the Brussels Airport. Another plane cut in front of us and the pilot had to give it full throttle and circle the city again. We stayed in Brussels overnight and our group was split in three parts and went to different hotels. Some went to the Pulmer; some to the Jolly; and the group I was with went to the President Hotel. It was very nice.

We were scheduled to depart Brussels at 1:45 P.M. on October 19th. The Sibena 747 had a oil-leaking engine. The mechanics worked on it for five hours while we wandered around the terminal. They eventually removed the engine and installed a different one. By the time we arrived in New York, everyone had missed his or her connecting flight. After checking through customs, we were put up at various motels. I was with a group that was lodged in a Travelodge Hotel. It was elegant compared to the 4-star hotels we were staying in while we were in Europe. We were offered dinner when we arrived (1:00 A.M.), but it was 6:00 A.M. Belgian time.

The next morning we were given slips for breakfast and a ride to La Quadadia Airport. I caught a Northwest flight at 10:00 A.M. and arrived home Friday afternoon.

It had been a very emotional trip. We have enjoyed freedom all our lives and can't visualize what it would be like to lose it. The Belgians and French, especially the Belgians, conveyed sincere appreciation for the sacrifices that the Americans had made on their behalf. They have also conveyed to the younger generation the need to remember what sacrifices that the Americans had made to insure their freedom.

Prepared for an earlier Thunderbolt By **Merle W. Mc Morrow**



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

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, or just click on the unsubscribe link on the email.
- Send any news, stories, or feedback to: 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 Miriam Boyle Kelly
19 Oriole Court
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Army Life, as told by PFC William B. Houston (Part 9)

Another chapter from **William Houston's** biography is on the following pages.

This chapter covers "Soissons".

Next week: "*The Battle of the Bilge*"



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

SOISSONS

In Soissons we were billeted in a former French cavalry installation which was not too bad. The barracks were clean and the barns, which were made of stone and covered with plaster, served as storage space and as our theater. The movies were shown as we sat on plain wooden benches. The officers must have had a separate area; at least I cannot remember a reserved section or any officers in our theater. Of course there was horseplay which went on before the movie to fill in the time because you had to get there early to get a seat. While waiting for the movie to start we played a game called "Ack-ack" which was played in this manner. Someone would blow up a condom, tie it and toss it into the air for others to throw lit cigarettes at. The object as to burst the condom and bring it down. If it floated down or near you, you bounced it up again to get it out of your vicinity. As time went on the "aircraft" became more sophisticated as different ingredients were put inside the condom, such as pepper, foot powder or tooth powder, so when hit the contents would rain down on those sitting under it.

While in Soissons I drew a very unusual guard duty assignment. I was posted outside of a whore house to be sure that only 517th men entered.

During December I was deep into chess and by combining my pieces with those of Jim Andersen, since we had both lost parts of our sets, we at least had one complete set.

I actually had a pass in my hand for a few days in Liege, Belgium but never did get a chance to use it. The Germans had started an offensive through Belgium and on December 21st, the day I was to go to Liege, all passes were canceled and orders were issued to move out to Belgium.