

3rd Prize Winner 13-15 age group

Thomas W.: Florida

WWII Operation Dragoon

Reporter from New York times talks about the invasion, Operation Dragoon, what it is, and why it is being done, what units are involved, and where it is taking place. He says that he is with one of the first units involved and will be sending dispatches back to the paper. He is with the 517<sup>th</sup> Regimented Parachute Combat Team and is recording the events taking place in the city and area of Province in *southern France*.

**Reporter-** I am interviewing a paratrooper nicknamed “Smiley” and you can see why, Smiley you seem to have a very pleasant smile!

**Smiley-** Yeah, I try to be friendly.

**R-** Where are you from back in the states?

**S-** I am from a small town in Pennsylvania, called Drums.

**R-** Why are you here? Why did you join the paratroopers?

**S-** I’m here to fight for our country and to defend the United States from the terrible Nazis. My brothers also joined. My brother Steve was just in the D-day invasion, he is an infantry staff Sgt. in the fourth infantry division. My brother Dint, is an infantry Sgt. in the Pacific and my youngest brother just joined the Army Air Corp. My mom says sometimes at night she thinks she sees the four of us walking across the field. She worries a lot.

**R-** Why did you decide to be a paratrooper?

**S-** Well you get extra money, \$50.00 more every paycheck for being a paratrooper. I send money home to my mom to help with family expenses. My dad is a coal miner, they recently bought a

farm and must make mortgage payments, so I try to help and send them money every month. Also, I think paratroopers are the best unit to be in, I believe one of our generals has said, "If they will jump out of a plane, you know they will fight." When I completed jump school, I received silver wings that we called the "badge of courage." Every one of the guys in our unit had the courage to jump out an airplane and these are the guys I want to fight with.

**R-** Your unit, the 517<sup>th</sup>, has already been involved in fighting in Italy, aren't you scared?

**S-** Everyone is scared in combat. It is okay to be scared, just don't be afraid! You can be scared and just do your job but don't ever be afraid to do it.

**R-** Are you worried about being killed?

**S-** No, I'm not afraid of death, to die fighting for one's county is a noble sacrifice.

**R** – Thank you Smiley. I am going to be following and documenting your units' progress.

After receiving their training at camp Toccoa in 1943, Smiley and the rest of the 517<sup>th</sup> were first sent to Italy and witnessed large amounts of fighting before being transferred to southern France where they would then take part in their first ever combat jump, also known as Operation Dragoon. After much preparation from the 517<sup>th</sup> parachute combat team it was finally time for Operation Dragoon to commence. The beginning of this operation was almost hazardous as many of the pathfinder planes missed their drop zones causing large numbers of the parachute teams to be placed in the wrong positions and at the wrong times. More specifically, the 517<sup>th</sup> parachute combat team was dropped at about 0430 with only one fifth of their men being dropped anywhere near the designated drop zone.

But no matter what obstacles were thrown their way, the men of this combat team were able to instantaneously begin to work away at the German defenses and within days of their

insertion they had already done tremendous work, severing enemy communications and ambushing German reinforcements that were being sent through the countryside. As their mission assignments progressed the soldiers of the 517<sup>th</sup> would attack the remaining German strongholds and try to clear a path for the infantry forces moving north following the beach invasion.

On the third day of their deployment there was no longer a need for their current instruction due to the now lacking German opposition, so after 19 listed KIA's, 137 injured soldiers, and 126 other soldiers wounded, the first battalion of the 517<sup>th</sup> parachute combat team was able to swiftly and dominantly move into the area of Peira Cava. At this same time the second and third battalions were assigned with the duty of capturing the towns of Fayence and Callian where they saw large amounts of success.

As their missions came to an end the 517<sup>th</sup> came together and defended a valley of hills over a 15-mile span before being deactivated and receiving a much needed break from hard fighting on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944. A final report of the companies' casualties showed over 100 men KIA and more than 500 casualties. We are beyond lucky and grateful for the sacrifices these men made for their country's future.

I am the reporter in this story, my name is Thomas Waskovich IV. The soldier I interviewed, and all of his remarks are real, is my great grandfather Thomas Waskovich Sr. He had four children and one of them, my grandfather Thomas Waskovich Jr., was a Green Beret Officer who fought with the only top -secret unit in the Vietnam War, MACVSOG. Thomas Jr. had four children, one of whom is my father Thomas Waskovich III. He was a Border Patrol Agent for ten years and now works on the FBI Terrorism Task Force. My great grandfather had a large and successful family with 23 great grand- children, and that is why Operation Dragoon

is so relevant to me. If my great grandfather had been one of the 560 airborne task force members killed during Operation Dragoon I WOULD NOT BE HERE TODAY. If he would have been killed none of my families' service and contributions to our country would have ever taken place.

The lessons that were learned through Operation Dragoon that are still relevant today are that many times in our history people tend to forget the supporting cast in life. Many famous people who receive the most praise from society would not have made it to where they are now without the support of the smaller aspects of life around them. The ways that Operation Dragoon were able to destroy and use up valuable German personnel and resources as well as provide multiple fronts of attack was a vital factor in how successful the storming of Normandy was and while they did an incredible job as well, the participants of Operation Dragoon and more specifically the 517<sup>th</sup> RCT, deserve more respect for the things they did in the process of taking back southern France from Germany. This is relevant and comparable to today's world in the fact that superstar athletes like Tom Brady have accomplished a lot due to their own skill and hard work, but at the same time they are given most of the credit while very important pieces to their success like Tom Brady's offensive line or coaching staff end up with fractions of the praise. Every piece is an interictal part of the outcome!

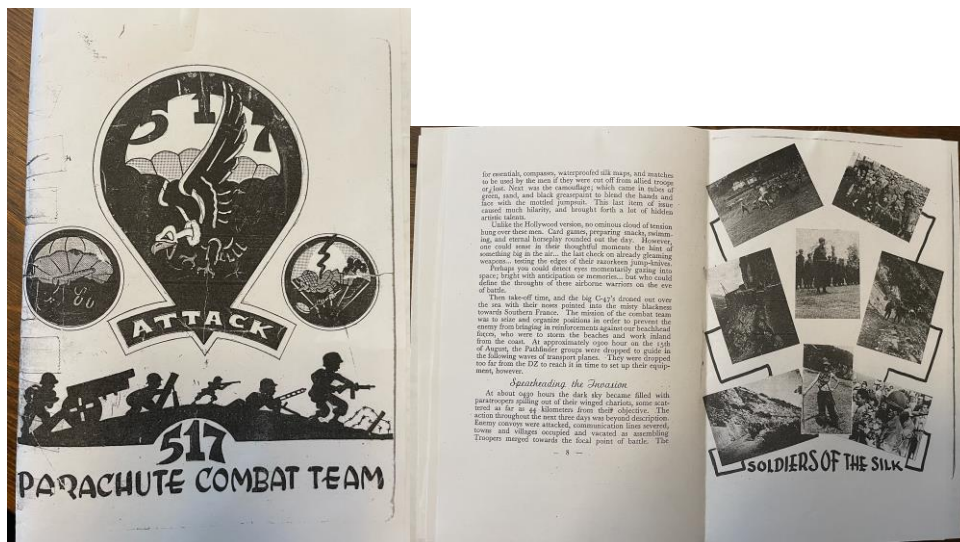
Operation Dragoon is so imperative for our country to learn about. The great sacrifice and loss to the families of the KIA and the tremendous loss to our country. There were 560 young men that were killed and the families they never had were never able to contribute to our country. Many Americans who never had the chance to live their lives and contribute to the greatness of our country. We should never forget the great loss and the great sacrifice of the servicemen who successfully completed Operation Dragoon. The admiration I have for my great

grandfather, my grandfather, and my father will continue to motivate me to do my best and fight for what is best for our great country. The story of Operation Dragoon should be and inspiration to all Americans.



## Resources Page:

517 Parachute Combat Team pamphlet containing information about the lives of men in the 17<sup>th</sup> Parachute Combat Team.



The Historical Atlas of World War II- Alexander Swanston/ Malcom Swanston.

<https://www.517prct.org/overview.htm> .

<https://www.operation-dragon.com/history/allied-units/517th-parachute-regimental-combat-team/> .