The Troop Carrier D-Day Flights

A fully documented close look at how the Troop Carrier C-47s and gliders delivered airborne troops and their equipment and supplies to the continent of Europe on 6 June 1944

®

WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT? Page

Part 1 Heart of the matter.. 5
Pathfinders first.. 7
Ready, Get Set... 9
A pilot's view of close formation with a C-47............. 10
Let's Go, said Eisenhower................................. 11
Part 2 Tales from ***GREEN LIGHT*** 17
Another subject—Scuttlebutt in general 20
Bing Wood's D-Day Diary.................................... 25
View from the cockpit 35
The Co-pilot.. 39
The *Three-Airplane Invasion of France*...................... 45
The One-Man Radio Show.................................... 51
Once a Secret report... 55
WACO CG-4A glider.. 58
No Engine, No Propeller, No Roar.......................... 59
A Glider Pilot's Story... 61
Air Evacuation of Normandy 66
IX Troop Carrier Command in WW II....................... 67
Pass in Review 68
IX Troop Carrier Command Final and Finest efforts 70
The legend of the DC-3 and C-47 71
A visit with our Fighter Cover............................... 72
Part 3 **FOR THE RECORD**—the documented views...........74
Glossary.. 77
REFERENCES.. 78
CONCLUSIONS.. 79

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This is a Digest. Much of it is *scan and paste* from other works—with permission, of course. The rest is mine. I have made every effort to give everyone proper credit. If I erred, I apologize.

I was a Troop Carrier pilot, although I did not participate in the D-Day flights. I flew in most of the other actions in Europe that followed, and I have worked closely over the years with many Troop Carrier veterans and professional historians to preserve our history.

I have two thoughts in mind here: (1) To bring forth, all in one place, some of the more interesting historical records of the Troop Carrier D-Day flights—and (2) To revive and collect some of the more representative stories of dedication, bravery, and accomplishment of Troop Carrier and Airborne forces serving together. We were indeed a great team.

There are tales-a-plenty about this, but only those that can be fully documented and accurately labeled as history are included in this chronicle.

Photo Lew Johnston files

Recording historian Lew Johnston on re-supply mission
to Thiensville, France, winter 1944

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WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?

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San Francisco, CA 94123
6 June, 2001 The 57th Anniversary

There are two versions of the Troop Carrier D-Day flights into Normandy still circulating among us today. The first is based on the works of recording historians like Dr. John Warren, Col. Charles H. Young, Donald vanReken, Harvey Cohen, Martin Wolfe, Robert Callahan, Neal Beaver, Arthur Een, Michael Ingrisano, Joseph Harkiewicz, and others. There are also official records of the 82nd Airborne Division debriefing sessions, and excerpts of reviews from high-level commanders like Generals John Galvin, James Gavin, Mathew Ridgway and Paul Williams. And this only scratches the surface.

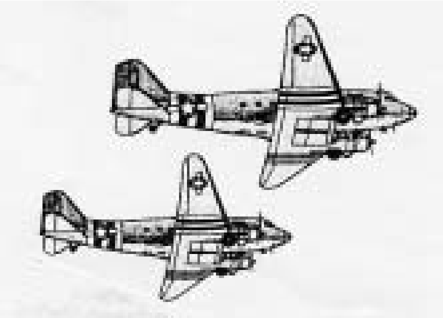
The second version is based on relatively recent oral reports gathered by "pop historians" writing best sellers—or producing TV documentaries. They appear to be working from limited research, and at least one has leaned heavily on the memories of a relatively small number of airborne troops, telling what they remembered, the way they remembered it 50 or more years earlier. These are sincere reports, but very few of these oral histories appear to be documented. Sometimes whole segments are left out. In researching the book D-Day, for example, author Stephen Ambrose chose not to interview any of the 821 Troop Carrier flight crews, even though access was offered.

Everyone who has studied the D-Day flights—even casually—knows that the mission didn't come off exactly as planned. Fifty seven years have passed since the event, and we all need to be very careful about who we listen to and what we accept as *history*. The first version, the one from the early historians, speaks of superb planning and a flawless execution of the flights—right up to the French coast. The second, the one from the "pop historians," tends to overlook the effects of the weather, and blames individual Troop Carrier pilots for almost everything that went wrong with the whole mission.

It is right to honor the paratroopers and glider soldiers, as most everyone does—but it is also right to honor the Troop Carrier crews who risked (and sometimes lost) their lives to deliver their troopers to their assigned drop zones. They salvaged the mission as best they could on their own initiative—in weather conditions that took away much of their visibility—and they did this without regard for personal safety. This is what they were ordered to do, and it is well documented by the professional historians that this is what they did.

I hope to encourage everyone involved here to think of the Airborne forces, and the Troop Carrier forces as *brothers-in-arms serving together in a common cause.* We were all in this together, fighting the same enemy in the same war.

Lew Johnston
WW II Troop Carrier Pilot
Recording historian—61st Troop Carrier Squadron



LITTLE DID WE KNOW

There was a great debate going on in the high command about whether the airborne troops should be used at all. Air Marshal Trafford Leigh Mallory, a prominent Wing Commander in the Battle of Britain, predicted that 50 to 70 percent of the Troop Carrier aircraft would be shot down in the assault. Leigh Mallory asked Eisenhower to cancel the American Airborne phase of the invasion.

Eisenhower quietly agonized over his air advisor’s request against Bradley’s revisions. Bradley, who had the support of the American Airborne commanders, acknowledged the risks, but thought them necessary for the overall success of the invasion.

In the end, after many agonizing hours of self-debate, Eisenhower agreed to continue the airborne assault. We know the rest.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

War Stories, More Stories…and Facts

From the Troop Carrier point of view, the historical cost of all this confusion is enormous. It is also understandable. The pilots fully understood the problems caused by the weather—while the paratroopers in the back could only speculate. There are no flight instruments back there—no altimeter, no airspeed indicator, and no way of determining position. Most paratroop veterans realize now that they couldn't have possibly known how desperately the pilots were trying to save the mission—nor was there any way of knowing that some of the pilots were sacrificing their lives to stay with their airplanes. Lt. Marvin Muir of the 439th Troop Carrier Group, for example, received the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) posthumously for giving his life, and the lives of his crew, for holding his burning C-47 level so his 101st Airborne paratroopers could jump. Some troopers also learned later that some of the flights that were judged harshly from the ground were manned by other crew members reported to have been reaching for the controls over dead or disabled pilots.

The Normandy pilots and crews were fully committed to completing the mission—and they were determined to do so. Official airborne records also show that the airborne troops in general were dropped close enough to their objectives to allow all three airborne divisions to accomplished their major missions by the end of the first day.

The spirit and dedication of all this is exemplified by the briefing Col. Charles H. Young, Commander of the 439th Troop Carrier Group, gave his pilots on 5 June 1944, Col. Young flew as lead pilot of the 439th Troop Carrier Group.

> "The main thing we're interested in tonight, even above our own safety—repeat, even above our own safety—is to put a closed-up, intact formation over our assigned drop zone (DZ) at the proper time, so these paratroopers of ours can get on the ground in the best possible fighting condition. Each pilot among you is charged with the direct responsibility of delivering his troops to the assigned DZ. Their work is only beginning when you push down that switch for the green light. Remember that."

BUT REALLY NOW, HOW WAS IT?

Yet even today, the authors, the publishers, and the producers of the TV documentaries still tend to blame the pilots entirely for erratic flights that some of the paratroopers reported. In a History Channel presentation on April 8, 2001 of 101st Airborne Division activities, the clouds and fog that caused the loss of effective control of the formations were mentioned only in passing. The heroic efforts of many of the Troop Carrier crews attempting to salvage the mission on their own initiative were not recognized at all.

The paratroopers were among the first into action, and the first to be relieved from the front lines. The rough ride some of them got was the reason for the quick judgments they carried with them into battle—and there was no way to cross check the details in that short time. It was also the impression many carried with them back to the streets and pubs of England. Reporters and correspondents, eager for sensational stories, jumped on these impressions, and passed them on to their editors—quite often without documentation. It was much too early for the refinements and filtering of the bull sessions and debriefing conferences that followed later.

The general views of Troop Carrier performance in Normandy vary widely between veterans of the 82nd Airborne Division and veterans of The 101st Airborne Division—with the most critical judgments coming from the 101st. There are still strong differences of opinion about this between veterans of these two divisions, but there are also many other well-documented records to supplement these opinions. Normandy was the first combat action for the 101st, while the 82nd had trained and fought with these same Troop Carrier units in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. It may be that they just knew a little more about what to expect.

A more likely reason for the difference is the relative time of arrival over the French coast. The first Troop Carrier serials in the lineup carried the 101st Airborne Division from airfields in Southern England, and this is when the fog and the clouds were the thickest. And this is also when and where the breakup of the formations was the most severe.

This gets even more confusing when one considers that it took five hours for the full formation to cross the French coast. The weather varied widely during those five hours—and each Troop Carrier pilot flew into the weather conditions that were there at the exact time he crossed. In the ways of war, there were some bad encounters and some equally bad flight experiences—but these were a relatively small percentage—and not one of them is at all typical of the full five-hour mission.

Many of the first reports from the paratroopers on the streets are still with us, appearing in popular books and in commercial World War II TV documentaries. The full story of these flights can't possibly be told accurately and professionally without input from the flight crews—and this is what is lacking in much of the more recent material we read and view today. This is a serious omission in any D-Day report labeled *History.*

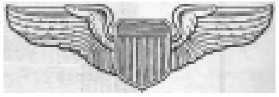
It is easy to understand the resentment of paratroopers for the rough ride some of them got—but it is also hard to understand how individual pilots can still be held responsible for the French weather—or for the command decisions that ordered them to fly in it. More detailed information about this is available in most libraries, and in reliable history websites on the Internet.

TRAINING FOR FLAK?

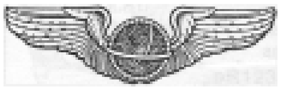
There has been other speculation (*and it is just that*) that the Troop Carriers might have continued through the fog in formation if they had been trained better for instrument flight (not so)—and that they might have been able to cope with flak and ground fire had they been trained to fly through it. This was, in fact, tried with disastrous results later in 1944 in a 349th Troop Carrier Group training exercise from Pope Field, North Carolina. This was scheduled in response to the suggestions of the 82nd Airborne commanders in their official debriefing conference. Three C-47s were lost in rain and fog out over the Atlantic before the mission could be aborted. It was tried again four weeks later in better weather. The conclusions were: *It is impossible to fly tight formations in the clouds—and anti-aircraft fire programmed to miss is not realistic training.* It cost fifteen lives to learn this.

Authors like Stephen Ambrose, Max Hastings, and the writers for the History Channel who refer to the Troop Carrier pilots as being unqualified and careless need to look again at the facts, now that they are so readily available. They haven't yet considered the lengthy training sessions in England to hone the night formation skills of the pilots—nor is there any apparent awareness of the intensive night practice drops with the paratroopers during the same period. For many weeks, this was the top priority in all Troop Carrier Groups, and very little else took place. Many of the pilots were combat veterans of North Africa, Sicily, and Italy—and all but the newest replacements had 500 hours or more in the air. Some had many more.

The most formidable enemy of the troop carrier airdrops on D-Day was the weather. And the most formidable enemy of historical truth everywhere is hazy memory and uncertain speculation.



USAAF Pilot Wings



USAAF Navigator Wings

THE PATHFINDERS WENT IN FIRST

The Troop Carrier pathfinders flew them in—and the Airborne pathfinders stayed to fight the war

The role of the Pathfinders was critical here, and must not be overlooked. The IX Troop Carrier Command Pathfinder Group (Provisional) was formed within the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing, under the command of Lt. Col. Joel Crouch—to provide accurate guidance for the airborne troops to their drop zones and landing zones. This group was the outcome of numerous meetings held in Comiso, Sicily between senior American and British commanders to critique the disappointing results of the airborne landings there.

It was clearly established that the use of assigned drop zones, marked in advance of the arrival of the main body of airborne troops, was sound thinking. In addition, the idea was that even if the pathfinders missed the zones a bit, and the zones were improperly marked, that at least the main body of the paratroopers would be dropped together. This would avoid the tragic scattering we experienced in Sicily.

Specially selected troop carrier crews and airborne troops were trained for specific pathfinder duties. The Rebecca-Eureka radar transponder system was utilized as a navigational aid for incoming troop carrier serials. Eureka was a portable responder beacon that was placed on a drop zone or landing zone on the ground. And after it was activated, it indicated it's approximate location on a receiver called Rebecca, in the cockpit.

Army Air Forces navigators also relied on *Gee,* a primitive electronic navigational system that worked to a degree, but was complex and time consuming to use. It required special training, and many crews found it awkward in combat. Some crews used it successfully, however.

The Pathfinder training, which had to do with the Army Air Force crews, was but a small part of the whole story, and should in no way be confused with the special training of the airborne pathfinder troops. They learned the proper ways to operate their special equipment, including long-wave radio, Rebecca-Eureka sets, smoke signals, holophane lights at night, fluorescent panels by day for marking landing areas and wind direction in the form of large "T"s laid out on the ground.

These troops learned to jump with all this equipment, and how to set it up once on the ground—all of this in 15–30 minutes in the dark—before the incoming serials began arriving. The Army Air Forces Pathfinders were only a means of transportation and delivery. That job accomplished, they immediately returned to their home base, leaving their airborne friends on the ground to fight the war.

Just before 10:00PM on June 5th, twenty C-47s of the 9th Troop Carrier Command Pathfinders Group took off from the base of North Witham, near Grantham, England. Each carried its elite pathfinder paratroopers and their equipment. The weather also scattered those who were to mark the DZs. Their destinations: Ste Mère Eglise and Ste Marie du Mont. These crews and their men were the first to know the exact place of the Normandy landings, and theirs were the very first flights. Multiple pathfinder teams preceded the main assault, but some missed their destinations by as much as 1-1/4 miles. They set up their transmitters where they landed, and this is why there were some conflicts between the visual sightings of the drop zones and the Rebecca signals

Lieutenant Colonel Joel Crouch piloted the lead plane, following his preset itinerary without any further radio communication. He crossed the English Channel, flying as low as safely possible, flying over the French coast just after midnight.

These pathfinders were absolutely essential to the success of this mission. Their job was to mark the proper DZs (drop zones) and LZs (landing zones) with luminous panels in the shape of Ts in predetermined places that were visible from the air, but not from the ground. In addition, smoke generators were also to be placed near the panels to indicate the wind direction. Radio direction finders beacons were also to be placed as homing beacons

The pathfinder force arrived over the beaches after an uneventful flight across the Channel, but after they made landfall they ran into problems. The lead C-47 ran into a bank of low-lying coastal cloud and disappeared from the view of the pilots in the rest of the formation. The loss of visual contact completely destroyed the essential integrity and the discipline of the formation that had been drilled into the pilots during their training. Some pilots elected to climb above the clouds, while others tried to go below them, and others tried to stay together. The disorder caused the formation to break up, and the force scattered. Then, to compound the problem, German flak came up to meet they low-flying C-47s as they crossed the coast. Many of the pathfinders were dropped away from their programmed destinations.

At 01:30AM, the planes carrying the 101st Airborne Division arrived over Normandy and began dropping their troops. In part because of the failure of the pathfinders to find their objectives, their planned drops were also scattered.

As a matter of general interest, one report states that the first person to land on the continent of Europe during the invasion was Captain Frank Lillyman of the 101st Airborne Division, an airborne pathfinder. Less than an hour after landing, Captain Lillyman heard the engines of the main body of IX Troop Carrier Command C-47s arriving from the west. They were carrying paratroopers of the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions—a sight that captain Lillyman hadn't time to enjoy. Lt. Col Patrick Cassidy, battalion commander of the 1st Battalion 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, ordered Lillyman to set up a roadblock near Foucarville.

And once again, we can be thankful for the American ingenuity that largely saved the day.

The Order Of The Flights

These Groups of The IX Troop Carrier Command flew from England to Normandy in the following order—from the following locations:

The Pathfinders went first, and made their drop at 0020.

The Pathfinders were followed by serials from the 438th Group at Greenham Commons — The 436th Group at Membury —The 439th Group at Upottery — The 435th Group at Welford Park —The 441st Group at Merryfield — and The 440th Group at Exeter.

All of the above groups airlifted units of the 101st Airborne Division, and flew from the above airfields in Southern England. They had the shortest distance to fly, and the most severe weather conditions.

The 82nd Airborne Division was carried by the following Groups, moving into the stream of traffic in this order:

The 316th Group at Cottesmore — The 315th Group at Spanhoe — The 314th Group at Saltby — The 313th Group at Folkinghan — The 61st Group at Barkston Heath — and The 442nd Group at Balderton.

The 434th Troop Carrier Group at Aldermaston, and the 437th Group at Ramsbury towed gliders on their first NEPTUNE missions.

Bill Brinson, Historian, 315th Troop Carrier Group
Author – *The Three One Five Group*

READY, GET SET……

TROOP CARRIER D-DAY WAS NOT ONLY A FLYING EVENT, IT WAS ALSO A DAY OF RECKONING FOR THE PLANNERS, AND THE GROUND CREWS

It was also the day of reckoning for the Troop Carrier Command operations officers. These men had carefully devised an extremely complex plan to assemble 821 C-47s into a workable formation. This needed to be launched and assembled precisely into a pattern that would deliver troopers and gliders to their specific drop zones and landing areas—on time and on the button.

Harvey Cohen, writing in the history of the 32nd Troop Carrier Squadron, comments about the amazing logistics of the mission:

> "The planning for D-Day, in retrospect, seems incredible. The airborne segment alone (the only part being considered here) was awesome. All the thousands of men and machines had to be moved about, many from the USA, and all of them had to be at exact locations at specific times.
>
> In the case of Troop Carrier, with its function of dropping paratroops, this involved working backwards from the time of the planned paratroop drop, in our case at 2:14AM on the 6th of June. The route of each unit had to be plotted and the number of miles had to be accurately determined so that calculations at prescribed air speeds (C-47's carrying paratroops flew inbound at 140 miles per hour) could be made. Still working backwards, each of the Groups, which came from three different Wing areas in England, had to be over check points at specific times so that there would not be several Groups flying through an airspace at the same time. And working still further back, the takeoff times and the assembly times had to be determined for each squadron of each group.
>
> Before all these events could take place, there had to be the fueling and last minute maintenance of hundreds of airplanes. All the aircrews had to be briefed on the scope of the mission, and then the details (e.g. flying in V of Vs, drop speed of 110 mph, return speed of 150 mph, no evasive action over the Drop Zone). At the same time the paratroops had to leave their own barracks areas and moved to various Troop Carrier bases. They had to be fed and provided with personal needs—and facilities they would need to load the planes."

June 6, 1944 was also the day of reckoning for the ground crews who serviced the airplanes. They also worked with the airborne troops to see that the correct materials were loaded onto the proper airplanes. Mortar ammunition, for example, would have been of no value to a rifle platoon. This was a logistics accomplishment of great magnitude, and no one could allow for any mistakes on D-Day.

The ground crews for any combat mission have one of the worst jobs of all—the long wait for the mission to return. A crew chief, for example, will have told his assistant what to do with his personal belongings—if he didn't make it back. No one expected this to happen, but empty C-47 parking revetments at the end of the day were silent evidence that it did. Life goes on, of course, but the loss of good buddies and true friends is never easy.

For the crews and airplanes that returned, major repairs were often made far into the night to make the airplane flyable the next day. Sometimes this was possible, and sometimes it wasn't. A pilot with a good crew chief and a good radio operator, considered himself "blessed"—especially if they were well-supported by other squadron maintenance types.

A Pilot's View Of Another C-47 Flying In Close Formation

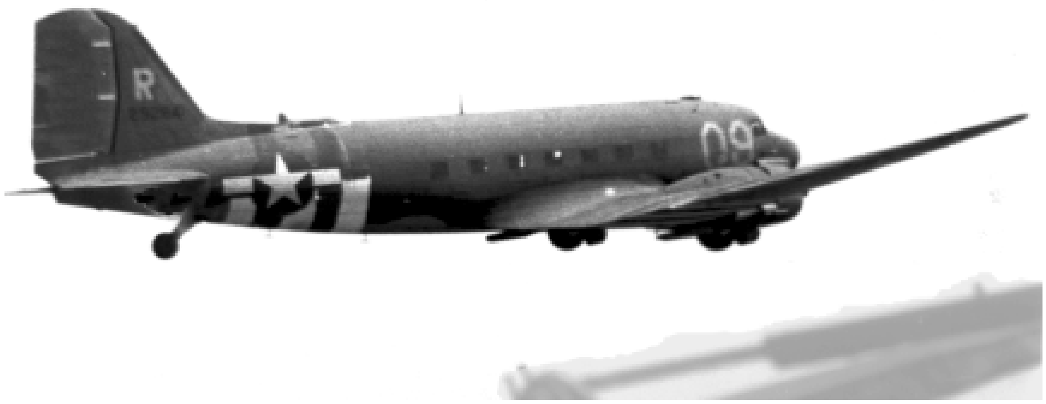


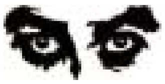
Photo Lew Johnston

This photo of *Turf & Sport*, taken later during Market-Garden, shows how tight the formations were flown during combat missions. The shadow in the lower right hand corner is the windshield wiper on the pilot's side of the cockpit of the photographer's airplane.

Troop Carrier pilots were all very well trained in the fine art of flying in close formation, and most of their missions were flown that way. To the uninitiated, this may look difficult, but formation flying soon becomes second nature. It can be done precisely, only if the pilots can see the other airplanes clearly—and a paradrop could not be flown accurately in WW II if the pilots could not also see the ground.

On D-Day, General James Gavin reported that he could not see the wingtip of the C-47 he was riding in (let alone the ground) while standing in the door—and neither could the pilots in that particular serial. This is why the airplanes scattered, and this is the reason some of the paratroopers were also scattered.

There is hardly time to blink



Formation flying requires constant attention

“LET’S GO” Said Eisenhower, The Supreme Commander Made His Decision

The training days were now over. Almost everyone involved in the flights on 6 June 1944 started in a briefing session in a chilly shelter somewhere in England. Here they were told what their part of the mission was to be, and how they were expected to carry it out. The one noticeable difference from the earlier Troop Carrier briefings for the North Africa, Sicily, and Italy missions was that the enlisted crewmembers were included—and as a result, much of the Troop Carrier history has been written by Sergeants like Martin Wolf, Bob Callahan, Bing Wood, Arthur Een, Michael Ingrisano, and others.

We’ve all seen the Hollywood scenes of dramatic commanders like John Wayne or Gregory Peck standing before maps or sand tables briefing their troops. “This is it men;” the scene goes, “Synchronize your watches. Five, four, three, two, one, HACK! Good luck.” The benches shuffle, and everyone moves out.

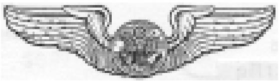
Some version of this took place in all the 18 aerodromes of the IX Troop Carrier Command—and in the staging areas of the troops they were to carry. These were scattered throughout the English Midlands and south and west of London at colorful places like Cottesmore, Merryfield, Folkingham, Saltby, Spanhoe, Ramsbury, Nottingham, Membury, Welford, Greenham Common, Exeter, Meryfield, Upottery—and others. It was finally the big day—following endless formation training and practice drops. Temporary numbers were chalked on the sides of each C-47 to tell paratroopers which plane to get on.

A DAY OF RECKONING

All in all, 821 Troop Carrier crews participated in the D-Day mission, and they were all loaded and launched as planned. In his book *Into The Valley,* Col. Charles H. Young describes the take-off and assembly of his 439th Troop Carrier Group:

“The Skytrains, upon take-off, turned in a closely-held well-practiced formation, passing back over the airfield as the last airplanes were taking off. As the last crews formed up on their flight leader, the formation flew toward the Bill of Portland, a checkpoint on the English coast checkpoint, headed southwest and turned off the red and green navigation lights. Then, 47 miles later, at the point where the formation turned southeast toward Normandy, downward recognition lights were turned off, and the blue formation lights on top of the wings and fuselage were dimmed until they could just barely be seen.

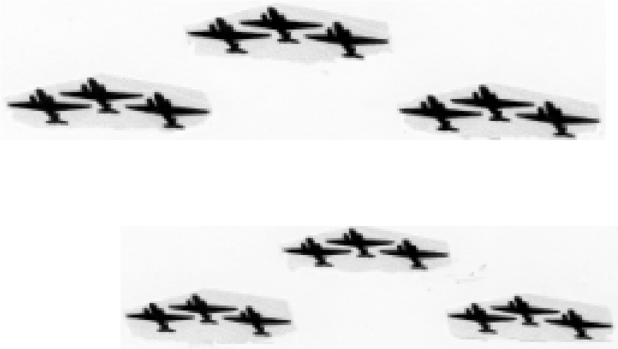
Serials of aircraft, made up almost entirely of 36 or 45 planes, flew as nine-ship Vs on Vs in trail. The leader of each nine-airplane flight kept 1000 feet behind the rear of the preceding flight. Leaders of the Wing elements in each flight were 200 feet back, and 200 feet to the right or left. Within each three-plane V, wingmen were to fly 100 feet back and 100 feet to the right or left of their leader. This was a tight formation at night for aircraft approximately 75 feet long and 95 feet from wing tip to wing tip.”



Enlisted crew member wings

THE TRADITIONAL V OF Vs IN SQUADRON STRENGTH

But if these 18 C-47s were assembled for one purpose, it would also be one *serial*



"Each formation serial crossed the coast of France at different times, but the experiences of the 439th Troop Carrier Group were typical. The clouds that the Pathfinders had encountered had materialized, and the enemy ground positions were on full alert. No lighted 'T' was visible in the Drop Zone, and the Eureka beacon had been set up only a few minutes before the serials arrived. Enemy fire became intense about eight miles from the DZs, and three airplanes of the 439th were shot down. The crew of one of them, piloted by Lt. Marvin F. Muir, got it's troops out at the expense of their own lives, by holding the aircraft steady while the paratroopers made their jump (Warren-97, 40)."

Col. Young reported later that the 439th Group lost three aircraft that day—with seven others damaged.

"Despite the large number of Troop Carrier serials that flew into the unpredicted cloudbank just off the western Cotentin coast, and despite the lack of electronic aids for night formation, the 439th continued on. In the final count, 35 to 40 percent of the paratroopers dropped that night landed within one mile of their intended Drop Zones, while approximately 80 percent landed within five miles." (Warren-97, 58).

INTO THE VALLEY

Col. Charles Young also reminds us that we just can't ignore the effects of the weather here, and the large part it played in the outcome of this mission.

> "The American Troop Carriers executed a nearly flawless performance right up to the French coast when they were swallowed up in the unexpected fog and clouds—and before they lost all visible control of the formation.
>
> Planners knew that there were clouds in this area three out of four June nights, but did not make suitable adjustments. According to Dr. John C. Warren, author of the USAF Historical Studies: No. 97, Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater; this "must be rated as a serious planning error." Some vital contingency planning for the Normandy airborne operations, possibly due to the confusion among SHAEF staff in the last 1-1/2 weeks, may simply have been forgotten."

According to USAF historical analysis: 'Time and again in big and little exercises during the past two months, and in several previous missions, wind and low visibility, particularly at night, had scattered troop carrier formations, twisted them off course or spoiled their drops. Yet the halcyon weather in EAGLE [the major practice mission for NEPTUNE] seems to have pushed all this into the background.

"The field orders for EAGLE had contained full and specific precautions against bad weather. Those for NEPTUNE were notably lacking in such precautions. Even the requirements of security and the need to send in the NEPTUNE missions under almost any conditions cannot fully explain this neglect." (Warren-97, 59, 26).

“Air navigation, though much maligned at the time, compared favorably with the sea navigation of the Navy, which missed Utah Beach by a mile and a half.” (Warren 97, 201). “Formation flying at night had not advanced into electronics. Pilots who were back in a formation kept their eyes glued to the shape in front of them, focused on the faint blue lights mounted on top of the wings, or on the glow of the exhaust stacks and flame dampeners. If they hit clouds, mid-air collision became an immediate concern.

Nevertheless, with all the difficulties in mounting such a massive airborne assault for the first time at night, and in marginal conditions, the effort was a success. At the close of D-Day, all three airborne divisions were able to report that their major missions had been accomplished. In fact, "the airborne phase of the Normandy landing was the first truly successful large-scale use of the new vertical flank—over the top of the enemy. Because it spearheaded the invasion of Europe, it has remained the most well known air assault of them all. It was in Normandy that the airborne concept came of age.” (Galvin, 155-57)

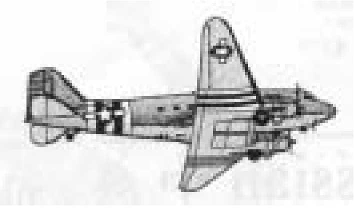
In his book *GREEN LIGHT*, Martin Wolfe points out that none of the difficulties the pilots faced were evident to the Airborne troops in the back of the airplane. He goes on to say:

> “American paratroopers were some of the most Gung-Ho soldiers we had. They were convinced they could lick any bunch of “Lousy Krauts” with one hand tied behind their backs. No one thought much about this at the time, but the troopers were left literally and figuratively in the dark during the flights. There was very little information to go on from that time on. Many of the airborne troops were purposely kept in a supercharged state of physical and emotional awareness. They were a tough bunch—not to be messed with. All they wanted to do was to jump and fight Germans.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

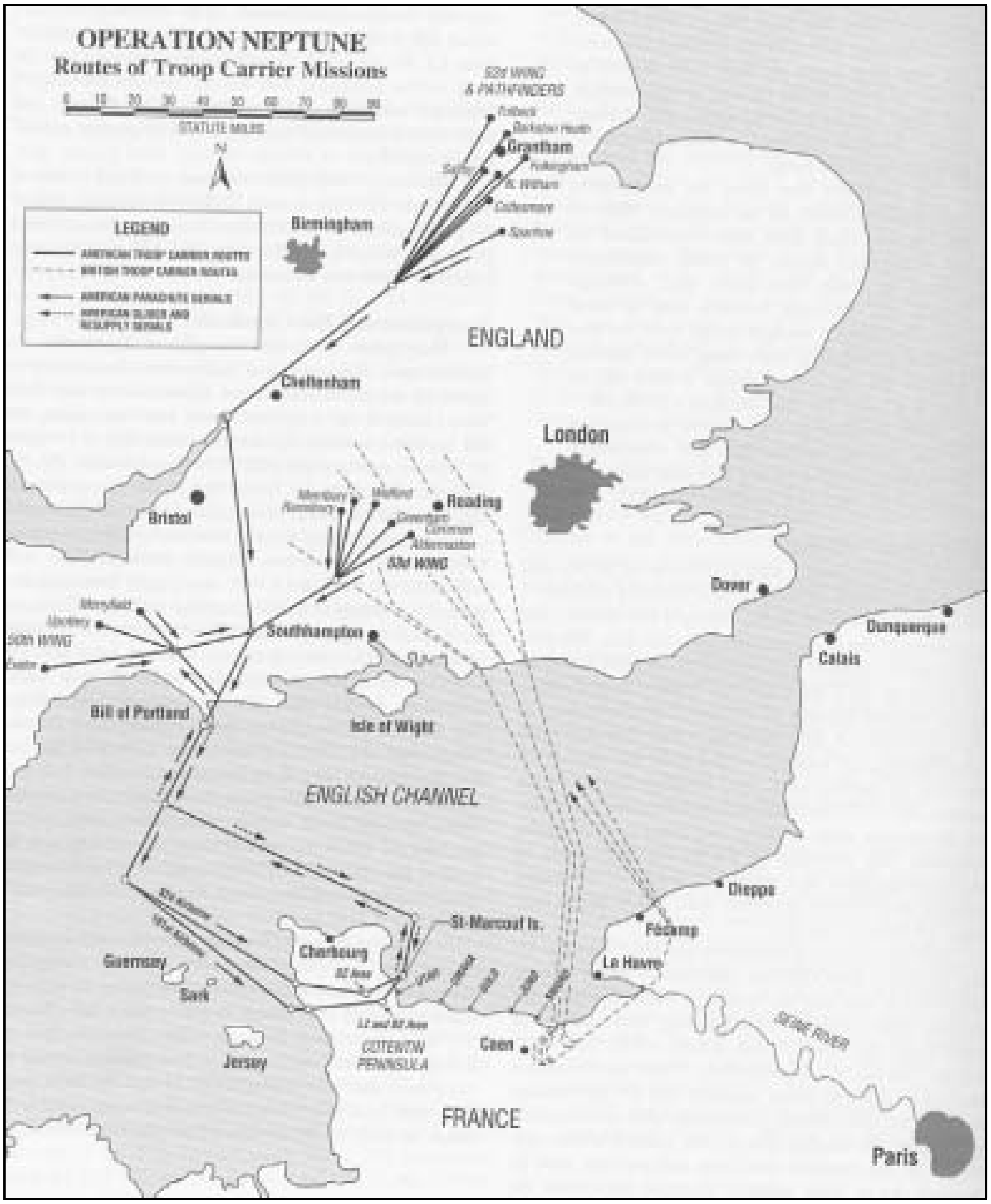
With everything considered, and given the circumstances, both the Airborne Forces and the Troop Carrier pilots did a superb job. 82nd Airborne commanders in their official debriefing conference reported that, in spite of the breakup of the formation and the loss of its precision control, many of the flights were carried out as briefed, and many of the objectives were taken as planned. The pilots, flying on their own initiative in the patchy fog, deserve their share of the credit for this.

We must also acknowledge here that we were supported on all sides by fighter aircraft that discouraged the Luftwaffe from attacking the C-47s and gliders. We must also acknowledge the support of the Eighth and Ninth Air Force bombers that softened up the air defenses on the ground. This was the kind of support that raised many glasses in the Troop Carrier Officers Clubs, and the NCO Clubs the next night.



Douglas C-47A

OPERATION NEPTUNE TROOP CARRIER ROUTES

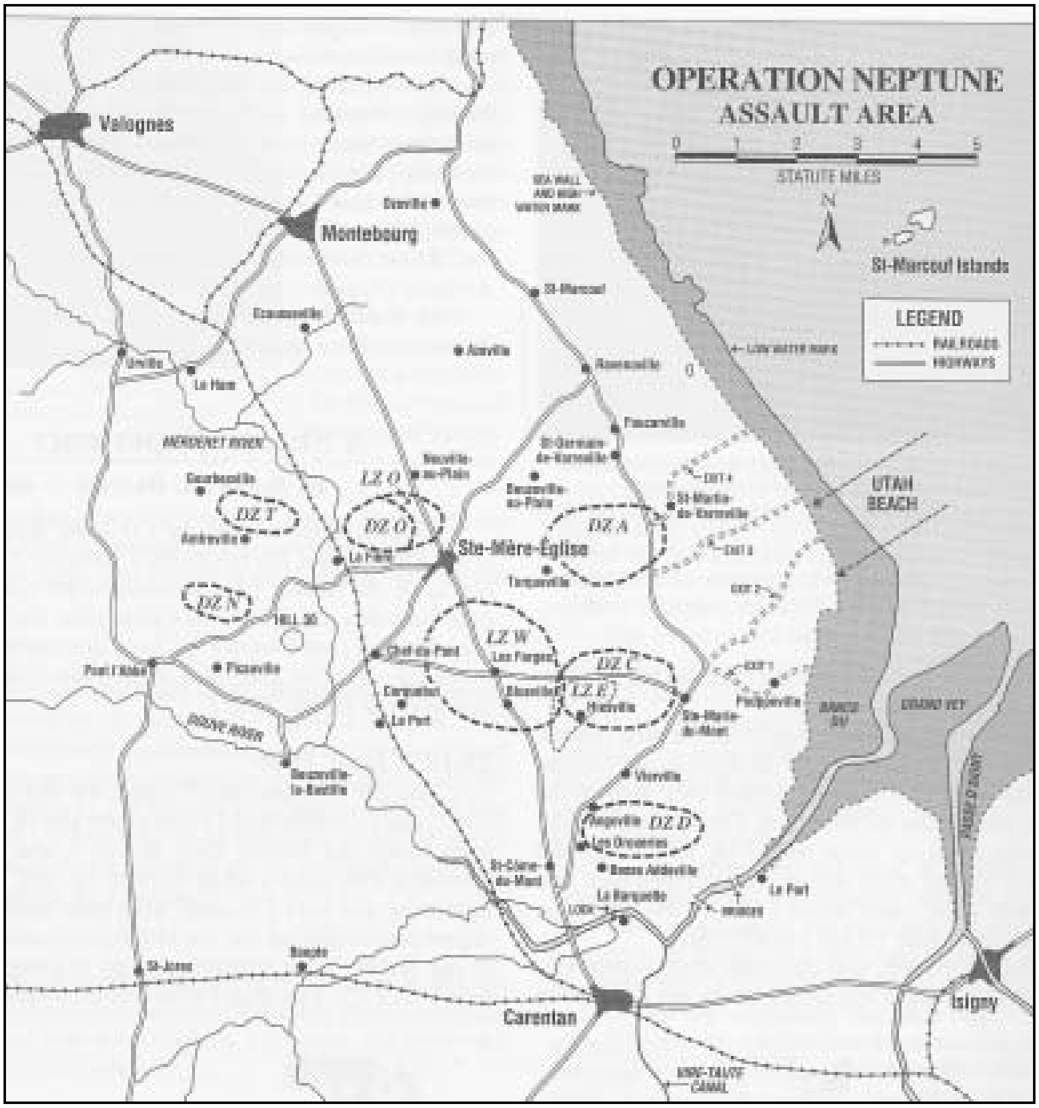

OPERATION NEPTUNE
Routes of Troop Carrier Missions
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90
STATUTE MILES
N
LEGEND
AMERICAN TROOP CARRIER ROUTES
BRITISH TROOP CARRIER ROUTES
AMERICAN PARACHUTE SERIALS
AMERICAN GLIDER AND RESUPPLY SERIALS
52d WING & PATHFINDERS
Fulbeck
Barkston Heath
Grantham
Saltby
Folkingham
N. Witham
Cottesmore
Spanhoe
Birmingham
ENGLAND
Cheltenham
London
Bristol
Membury
Ramsbury
Welford
Reading
Greenham Common
Aldermaston
53d WING
Merryfield
Upottery
50th WING
Exeter
Southampton
Dover
Calais
Dunquerque
Bill of Portland
Isle of Wight
ENGLISH CHANNEL
St-Marcouf Is.
Cherbourg
Guernsey
Sark
Jersey
COTENTIN PENINSULA
Caen
Dieppe
Fécamp
Le Havre
SEINE RIVER
FRANCE
Paris

Reproduced from INTO THE VALLEY

A total of 821 Troop Carrier C-47s took off at planned intervals from the above bases in England. They all passed over check point Bill of Portland at their assigned altitudes at their designated times in a long string headed toward Normandy.

Please refer to page 10 for a copy of the original flight orders issued to crews of the 314th Troop Carrier Group at Saltby.

OPERATION NEPTUNE PLANNED ASSAULT AREAS


OPERATION NEPTUNE
ASSAULT AREA
0 1 2 3 4 5
STATUTE MILES
N
St-Marcouf Islands
LEGEND
RAILROADS
HIGHWAYS
SEA WALL AND HIGH WATER MARK
LOW WATER MARK
UTAH BEACH
Valognes
Montebourg
Ozeville
St-Marcouf
Azeville
Ravenoville
Foucarville
St-Germain-de-Varreville
Beuzeville-au-Plain
St-Martin-de-Varreville
EXIT 4
EXIT 3
EXIT 2
EXIT 1
Neuville-au-Plain
LZ O
DZ O
DZ T
DZ N
DZ A
LZ W
DZ C
LZ E
DZ D
Ste-Mère-Église
Turqueville
Le Ham
MERDERET RIVER
Gourbesville
Amfreville
La Fière
HILL 30
Pont l'Abbé
Picauville
DOUVE RIVER
Chef-du-Pont
Les Forges
Blosville
Hiesville
Ste-Marie-du-Mont
Pouppeville
Le Port
Beuzeville-la-Bastille
Vierville
Angoville
Les Droueries
Basse Addeville
St-Côme-du-Mont
La Barquette
LOCK
Le Port
St-Jores
Baupte
Carentan
Isigny
GRAND VEY
VIRE-TAUTE CANAL

Reproduced from INTO THE VALLEY

This map shows assigned assault areas that the Troop Carrier crews were aiming for when they encountered the low clouds and ground fog. Since the clouds were moving and the ground fog was lifting, some Troop Carriers had worse visibility problems than others in their five hours of flying over France.

The 314th Troop Carrier Group, for example, was able to drop its load of 82nd Airborne paratroopers nearly as briefed. General James Gavin flew in the lead airplane commanded by Col. Clayton Stiles—one similar to those pictured and described here.

Part 2

The Troop Carrier D-Day Flights

More Documentation Of The Events Of 6 June 1944

An Invitation

We invite you to sit in on the pre-mission briefing sessions some of the preparations for D-Day flights—and then you will ride along in Troop Carrier C-47s actively flying the mission. You will be the guests of *GREEN LIGHT* crews, and T/Sgt. “Bing” Wood, a veteran Troop Carrier Crew Chief of North Africa, Sicily, Italy.

Then paratrooper Neal Beaver will describe his experiences from takeoff through his Normandy experience—followed by an account of the same flights by the Troop Carrier crews.

On other flights, you will share the cockpit with pilot Harvey Cohen—and on another aircraft, the Radio operator’s station with Arthur Een. And then, see what happens when a jumpmaster decides to call the shots, and waits through two passes before jumping his stick. And not to be left behind, ride along on a glider mission, and the return of the crew to England

We also invite you to look in on the operations of the 357th Fighter Group—one of several that looked after us that day. They are a bit different.

A FINE EXAMPLE

Each Troop Carrier squadron has its own D-Day story. This one was written by Martin Wolfe, a radio operator in the 81st Troop Carrier Squadron of the 436th Troop Carrier Group, based at Membury in southern England. It is a chapter in Marty's book *GREEN LIGHT*, and it is reproduced here with permission. The paratroopers were members of the 101st Airborne Division.

From "Green Light"

Special Troop Carrier D-Day Flights

"Historians of D-Day agree that up to the point we crossed the Cotentin peninsula and headed toward the drop zones that the pilots flew a flawless formation under difficult circumstances: It was a tribute to training that the outward flight west of the Cherbourg peninsula was executed according to plan and without incident. This is the judgment of the Official Air Forces history, and other historians and journalists agree.

As we turned southwest from our corridor over the channel and toward Normandy, the feeling grew that this monstrously complicated operation was clicking along perfectly. This feeling was strengthened when we saw that the anti-aircraft fire from the German-held Channel Islands (Guernsey and Jersey) was short, as we had been told it would be.

A QUIRK OF FATE, The clouds and the fog

A few minutes later, as we reached the western coastline, disaster loomed up at us; we slammed headlong into a dense cloudbank. Nothing had prepared us for this. The weather briefing had not foreseen it; our flight over the English Channel had encountered only scattered clouds. The cloudbank was thicker in some spots than others. For some of us it was so thick that it was as if we had stopped flying through the air and were now flying through a grayish soup. (James Gavin, then commanding a regiment of the 82nd, and flying in another serial, reported that he couldn't even see the wing tip from the open door of his C-47). The pathfinders had also flown through these clouds, but because of the orders for strict radio silence, they had not warned anyone of this terrible danger.

Flying in almost zero visibility, wing tip to wing tip, at the assigned altitude of 700 feet and level at 110 mph, the pilots suddenly had to decide how to save their crews, the paratroopers, and the planes. Immediately, pilots flying in the number two and three positions in each V pulled away, back, right or left to minimize the imminent danger of colliding with their leader. Some pilots climbed, getting out of the cloudbank at about 2000 feet, and some pushed their planes' noses down and broke out of the clouds at around 500 feet. A few bulled their way through at 700 feet, the altitude they had been flying before hitting the clouds. All miraculously escaped smashing into other planes. In a few tragic moments, without the discipline and control of the formation, the prospects for a concentrated paratrooper drop had been demolished. Meanwhile, our Drop Zones were coming up in ten or twelve minutes.

A TERRIBLE RESPONSIBILITY

A terrible responsibility now fell upon the shoulders of every pilot and every navigator (in planes that had them). The murderous cloudbank thinned out as we flew east over the Cotentin peninsula—and soon we could begin to see some features on the ground. Each pilot knew that in the preceding formation breakup he could have strayed many miles off course. The Cotentin peninsula is only 23 miles wide, and we had about six or seven minutes left before our Drop Zone was to come up. Decisions had to be made quickly. Each pilot—now essentially on his own—had to climb (or descend) to 700 feet, the best height for the paratroopers to jump from; and he had to slow down to 100 / 110 mph to avoid too much stress on the parachutes.

Looking down you could begin to spot a few landmarks—a town, a railroad, and a river—that might or might not correspond to the checkpoints we were briefed to look for around our Drop Zone. And as if things were not bad enough, we now saw that the "Eureka-Rebecca" radar beacon system was not fully in place to guide our flight leader to the correct Drop Zone. And crews of the few planes that had the more sophisticated "Gee" radar location device didn't find them useful under these conditions.

The pathfinders had also been hampered by the fog and had been unable to find the right locations to set up their holophane "T" lights and radar beacons. All that remained for most of the pilots and navigators was to try to recognize some landmarks in the darkness—and give troopers the green light when there was a reasonable chance of their jumping close to our Drop Zone A.

THE RED LIGHT

And now, in my plane, the red light at the door is on—four minutes to go! The paratrooper jumpmaster yells out 'Stand up! Hook up! Sound off for equipment check!' The troopers yell back, in sequence from the rear, 'Sixteen OK! Fifteen OK! Fourteen OK' Then the jumpmaster screams out 'STAND IN THE DOOR.' And the troopers squeeze forward against each other, their right hands on the shoulders of the man in front. One last jump master yell**:** 'ARE WE READY? ARE WE FRIGGING-A READY?' There is no answering yell; everybody is waiting for the door light to change to green.

Mercifully, up to this point the paratroopers had no way of knowing we were in big trouble. But now pilots in some planes, already badly rattled by the loss of formation control, began to see flak and small arms fire coming up at them. They dove and twisted under the upcoming arcs of tracer bullets while the heavily laden troopers struggled to stay on their feet. Some planes whipped around badly, forcing troopers down on their knees. Barf buckets" were knocked over and vomit spilled out, causing a dangerously slippery floor. Crew chiefs and radio operators in the rear screamed at the pilots to keep the planes steady.

'Watching the tracers come up at us made the hairs on the back of my neck feel as though they were standing up and it's still hard to laugh about things like that. These things are stamped indelibly in my mind: the rattle of flak fragments against our plane; the sight of flak and tracers above us, some seeming right on the mark for planes in front of us; the stark terror in some paratroopers' eyes, their vomiting into their helmets and forgetting to empty these helmets when it came time to "Stand Up! Hook Up!" as they prepared to make possibly their final jump.' (Ben Obermark, crew chief)

When the pilots finally snapped on the green light it must have been a kind of momentary relief to the paratroopers, as they went out the jump door, heading for uncertain but presumably solid ground beneath.

'After we were in those clouds a few minutes some bright searchlights came on; the way they lighted up the clouds almost blinded me. Flak and tracers were everywhere. One of our squadron's planes was taking such wild evasive action that he almost drove me into the ground. It took every bit of my strength and know-how, plus that of our co-pilot, Doug Mauldin, to prevent a collision.' (Don Skrdla, pilot)

THREE PASSES AT THE DROP ZONE

The instant before the lead trooper jumped, the heavy door bundles had to be pushed out. In the plane piloted by Don Skrdla the awkward bundles jammed the door space with fiendish perversity, thwarting every effort of the crew and the troopers to push them out. There would have been no time for Skrdla to drop his troopers short of the English Channel. He flew out over the water, turned right, came back over land again, and made another pass at his drop zone—but the door bundles were still malevolently stuck. Skrdla had to make yet a third pass before the bundles could be freed and his troopers could get out. For this exhibition of skill and cool judgment he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the only one granted to our Squadron.

Asked what was going through his mind at that time, Skrdla said, "Nothing much, apart from how scared I was"; and he claimed much of the credit should go to the crew chief, Dick Nice, the one who managed to clear that door. Pressed further, Skrdla added, "It just wasn't in the book for me to go back with paratroopers in my plane." After his plane was headed home over the Channel, Skrdla got a shock when he looked back and saw one of his passengers still sitting there, but it turned out he was not a paratrooper but a newspaper reporter who had no intention of jumping.

Francis Farley (Operations Officer of the 81st TCS) was the leader of the second flight of nine planes. When we went through that famous cloudbank that hung over the Cherbourg peninsula, we were in a V-of-Vs of nine planes. Col. Brack was the leader of the other flight. As soon as Brack saw that cloudbank he went down to get through it; he figured he would still have enough altitude for the paratroopers underneath it.

But Farley, for some reason, thought he saw Brack turn to the left. So he also took his serial down under the cloud bank and turned our planes to the left. But we went too far north, and as a result we came out very near the top of the peninsula. We found ourselves only about five miles from the port of Cherbourg; and of course immediately we ran into heavy flak and other ground fire.

When we started to receive anti aircraft fire we were at a railroad junction some ten miles south of Cherbourg. Farley asked for a new heading to the Drop Zone. When we turned to a 180-degree heading, we were over land; we did not fly over the coast, but sighted some burning buildings at Ste. Mere Eglise and dropped our paratroop stick. By this time only 3 planes remained; the others lost us in the descent through the clouds.

We had hits in our vertical stabilizer. There was a hole big enough for a man to crawl through, but fortunately none of the main controls were hit. We also took hits in one of the main gas tanks and lost a large amount of our fuel.

CLOSE CALL GETTING BACK

‘It was a close thing getting back to base. We were coming in with the indicator showing no fuel in the tanks. As we made our final approach, Lt. Greg Wolf, just ahead of us, landed and almost immediately went up on his nose because his tires had been shot out during the drop. We managed to pull up into the air just enough to clear his plane and immediately landed at a nearby base. When we got out the smell of gas was overpowering; it had sprayed over the entire fuselage.’ (Bob MacInnes, navigator)

In addition to the big hole in the vertical stabilizer in Farley's plane, we got our left wing tip shot off, and there was a really big hole in the fuselage where the door load had been before it went out. This must have been from one of those small explosive shells the Germans were using. It sure made a mess of the floor and a part of the sidewall. I also got a little piece in my wrist, but I didn't know anything about this until two days later when it began to get sore and infected. Doc Coleman dug it out with a large needle.

If those shell fragments had hit there before the door bundle went out, it would have been goodbye. The door load, all 1,100 pounds of it, was mortars and mortar ammunition. It had been resting on the floor directly above the shell hole.

‘The door load and the first paratrooper went out of the door as one. Everyone else in the stick went out in seconds. Major Farley acknowledged my yell of "All out!" and made a sharp turn to get away as I began to pull in the static lines. These were fifteen foot long tapes made of heavy webbing that were attached to the parachute rip panel and pulled open the chute when the paratrooper jumped. So there were eleven sets of static lines plus the two from the door load. Getting that sort of stuff inside the plane was not easy. Before I got them half way in, the navigator, MacInnes, and Chick Knight, the radio operator, had to come give me a hand.’ (Howard "Pat" Bowen, crew chief)

“HELLO DARKY”

‘After the drop, we had some bad moments. Of course by then we were all alone. Out over the Channel, I called "Hello Darky" (a British direction-finding system) to get a steer home. The fix they gave me didn't seem right but I figured they knew what they were doing. I made about a 180-degree turn; but pretty soon I saw all those lights and gun flashes, and I saw that I was damned near over Cherbourg again! So then I turned around and headed back home. By the time I got in, they'd given us up for lost.’ (William "Rip" Collins, pilot)

In my (Marty Wolfe) plane, piloted by Jack Wallen, we began to yell and thump each other on the back as soon as the wheels touched the runway at Membury. The release from that frightful tension made us all a little giddy.

Crews walked in a glow across the field toward the Operations room. One plane after another came in, most with little damage. When the last plane's wheels touched down, about 0400 (June 6), the crews all broke out in crazy yells and whistles. For this, our first combat mission—and a very dangerous one—we had sent out eighteen planes and returned eighteen planes. The contrast between what we had been led to expect, and what actually happened was stupefying.

We got boisterous, almost hysterical, congratulations from the men who had been waiting for our return. While we were being debriefed we were given a medicinal double shot of rye by Jesse Coleman, our Flight Surgeon, plus the usual post-flight coffee and sandwiches. Later we all trooped over to the Group Theater for a critique by our Colonel Williams. He told us that none of the Group's ninety planes had been shot down, though three planes had been hard hit by bullets or flak. Colonel Williams told us he was proud of us. Who could blame us for thinking the first D-Day mission had been a great success?

We were not alone in this delusion; the diarist of the 82nd TCS wrote, "The mission was successful—all planes dropped on or near the 'T' and there was very little opposition—some small arms fire and almost no flak." The diarist for the 79th TCS stated, "On this mission all planes discharged their troopers over, or at least very near the appointed 'drop zone' and returned without loss of either personnel or aircraft."

It wasn't until much later, when we heard rumors of complaints from paratroopers dropped far from their assigned drop zones, that we began to wonder about the scheduling of the mission, and the problems created by ordering us into questionable weather. We also wondered how we might have done better under the circumstances." (Marty Wolfe)

ANOTHER SUBJECT—Scuttlebutt In General

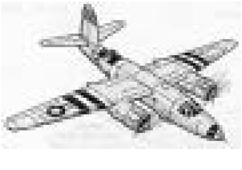
Not everyone experienced the same thing. Two examples of how the truth was often lost

There is no direct connection between this partial page and the book *GREEN LIGHT*—it just fits here. Differing views just can't be ignored, and in our effort to be objective, we quote the following parts of *Letters to the Editor* from the November 2000 issue of *THE MARAUDER THUNDER* (The Marauder pilot's newsletter). Two B-26 pilots were writing in response to earlier editorial comment in Thunder about the Troop Carrier D-Day flights.

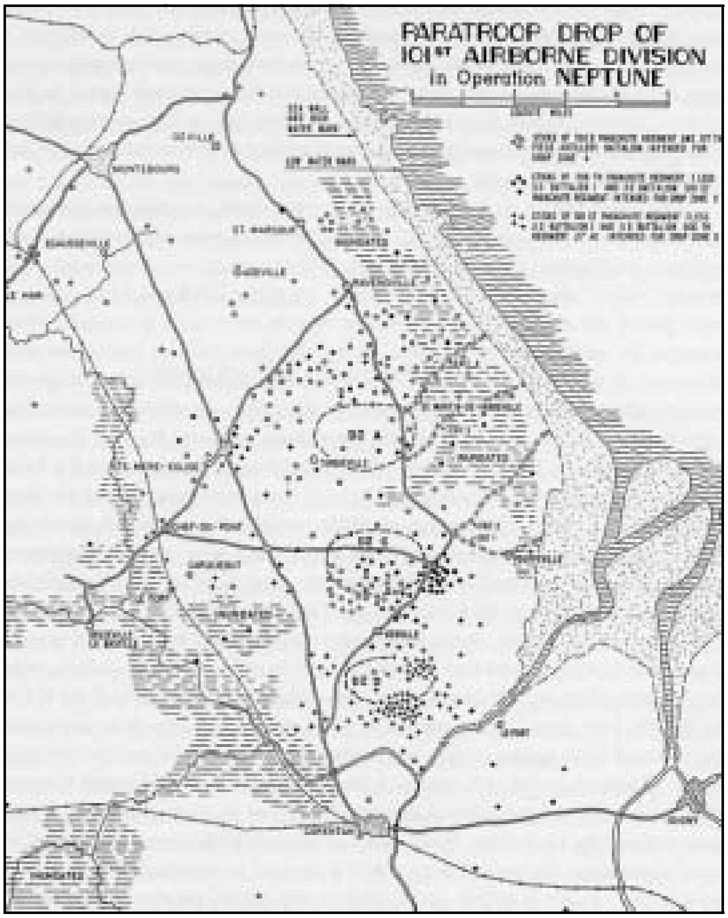
> *I wanted to comment on the item in the last issue of 'Thunder" which took Stephen Ambrose to task about his statements in the book. "D-Day: June 6, 1944" about the ineptness of the C-47 crews that flew the airborne troops of the 82nd and 101st into Normandy on D-Day. I believe it has been documented elsewhere that the C-47 guys did goof badly and scattered the paratroopers all over the terrain, and not in the areas they were targeted to land in.*

> *Frankly I am surprised that this fiasco did not get wider publicity. 1 recall listening to Calais German propaganda broadcast while enroute to second D-Day mission and heard about the reckless way the parachutists and gliders had been dumped in and around the channel that morning. I put it down to propaganda, but did observe what looked like a mess down there.*
>
> *Shortly after D-Day, we were on pass in London when we encountered some Airborne troops who spotted our 9th Air Force patches and wanted to fight us on the spot. After calming them down, we found that they took us to be the transport pilots who had carried them into combat. After telling them that we were in fact bomber crews, they proceeded to unload re: the quality of the pilots. According to stories we heard, they were mostly airline pilots on temporary duty who had never seen flak before, and when the stuff started burning all around, they rang the bells and got rid of their loads and/or tows.*

The Thunder editor printed the full letters from his members, with the firm reminder to all that the statements were not documented—nor were they likely to be. Many of the Troop Carrier Group Commanders were Reserve Officers who had been called back to active duty from airline careers, and all had flown in the Troop Carrier campaigns in Africa, Sicily, Italy, and southern France. The great majority of the First Pilots had 1,000 hours or more, the co-pilots 500 or more, and the senior enlisted crew members were all experienced veterans of the earlier campaigns.



REPORTED DROP LOCATIONS OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION

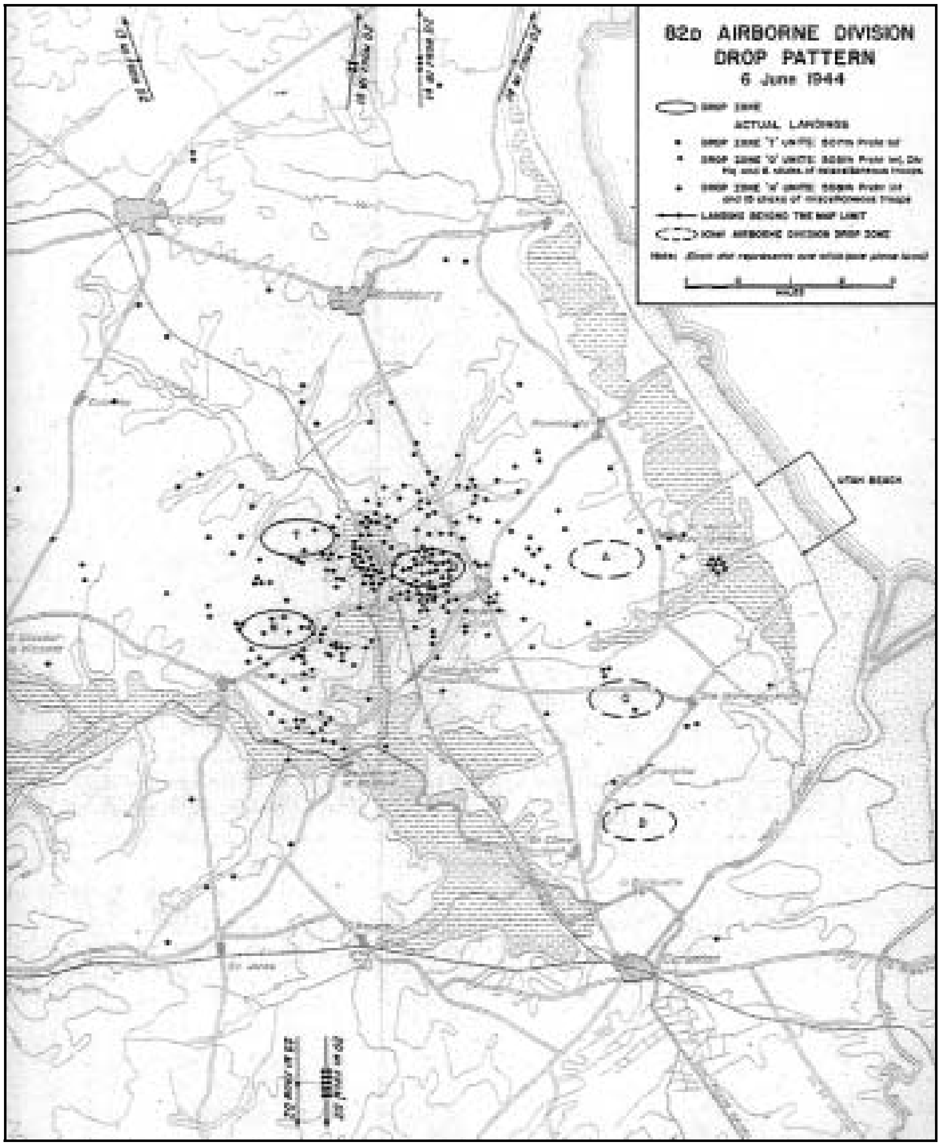


(From Warren II, courtesy USAF Historical Research Center)

These locations were recorded as accurately as possible under the circumstances, but veterans of both the 101st and the 82nd Divisions are often heard to say that there is much room for error here. The 101st was carried in flights that crossed the French coast when the fog was very thick, and the clouds were low. This meant that their delivery was probably less precise than the following flights. The result was a scattered pattern very much like the one shown here—even though it might not be exact.

We must also remember that many of these young 101st paratroopers were going into combat for the first time. The 82nd Division had combat experience with Troop Carrier in Sicily and Italy, but this was the first actual combat for the 101st. A number were dropped away from their Drop Zones—and in the dark and the fog, they may not have had any real idea of how near or far off they were.

REPORTED DROP LOCATIONS OF THE 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION

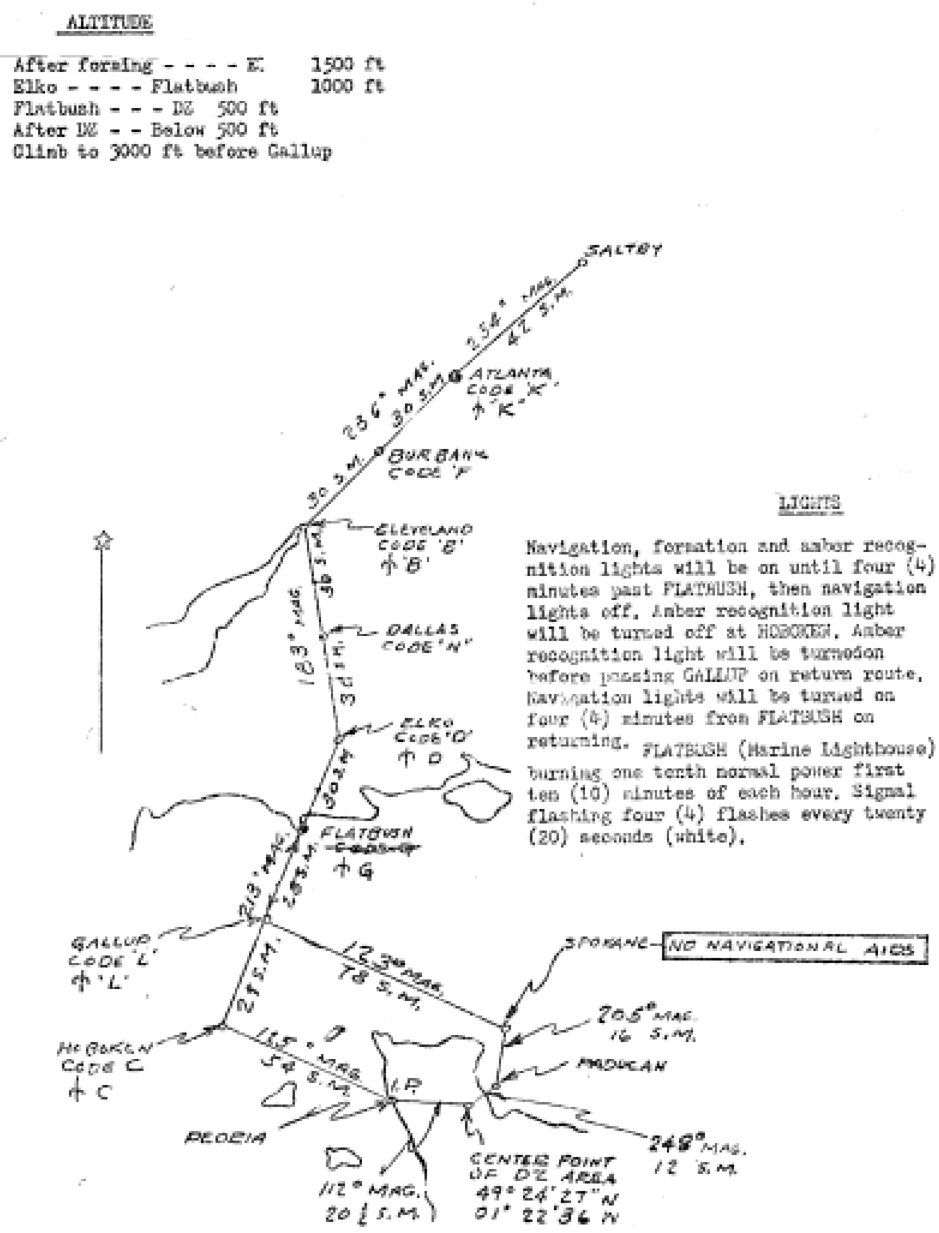

82D AIRBORNE DIVISION
DROP PATTERN
6 June 1944
DROP ZONE
ACTUAL LANDINGS
LANDINGS BEYOND THE MAP LIMIT
UTAH BEACH

Provided by the 508th PIR, 82nd Airborne Division

There appears to be a better drop pattern here. The 82nd was carried by C-47s of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing. They had a long history together and were comfortable with each other.

There is no way to undo or redo any of this, but it is interesting to speculate how things might have turned out at the end of a near perfect flight to France, had the weather been better.

ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED TO D-DAY FLIGHT CREWS AT SALTBY ARMY AIRFIELD, England 6 June 1944


SALTBY
256° MAG
42 S.M.
ATLANTA
CODE 'K'
'K'
236° MAG.
30 S.M.
BURBANK
CODE 'F'
30 S.M.
CLEVELAND
CODE 'B'
'B'
183° MAG.
30 S.M.
DALLAS
CODE 'N'
30 S.M.
ELKO
CODE 'D'
D
30 S.M.
FLATBUSH
~~CODE G~~
G
213° MAG.
25 S.M.
GALLUP
CODE 'L'
'L'
21 S.M.
123° MAG.
78 S.M.
SPOKANE
NO NAVIGATIONAL AIDS
HOBOKEN
CODE C
C
115° MAG.
54 S.M.
I.P.
205° MAG.
16 S.M.
PADUCAH
PEORIA
248° MAG.
12 S.M.
112° MAG.
20 ½ S.M.
CENTER POINT
OF DZ AREA
49° 24' 27" N
01° 22' 36 W

ALTITUDE

After forming - - - - E. 1500 ft
Elko - - - - Flatbush 1000 ft
Flatbush - - - DZ 500 ft
After DZ - - Below 500 ft
Climb to 3000 ft before Gallup

LIGHTS

Navigation, formation and amber recognition lights will be on until four (4) minutes past FLATBUSH, then navigation lights off. Amber recognition light will be turned off at HOBOKEN. Amber recognition light will be turnedon before passing GALLUP on return route. Navigation lights will be turned on four (4) minutes from FLATBUSH on returning. FLATBUSH (Marine Lighthouse) burning one tenth normal power first ten (10) minutes of each hour. Signal flashing four (4) flashes every twenty (20) seconds (white).

DEDICATED TROOP CARRIERS WHO MADE THINGS HAPPEN

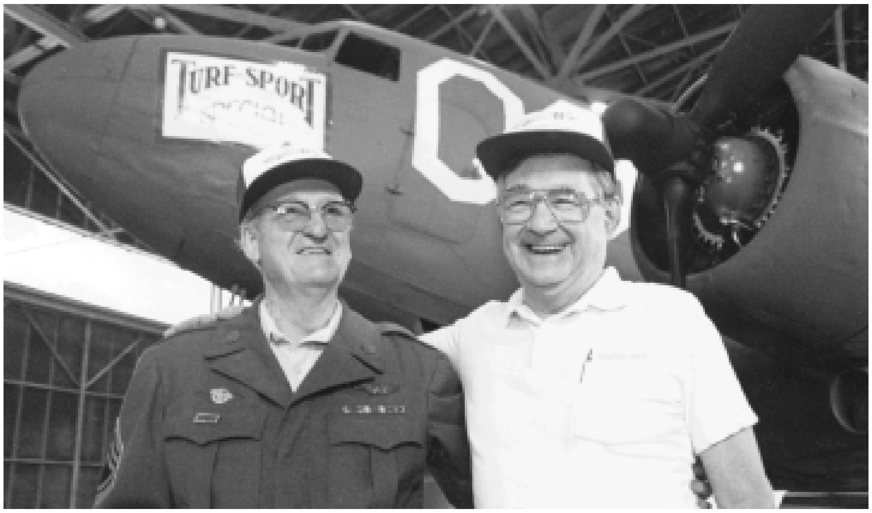


Photo AMC Museum

Crew Chief “Bing” Wood, and Technical Supply Sgt. Tony Cicippio, both of the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron, 314th Troop Carrier Group. “Bing,” now deceased, is the author of the following diary entries, and this is the C-47 he is describing. It is now restored and on display in The Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base, DE.

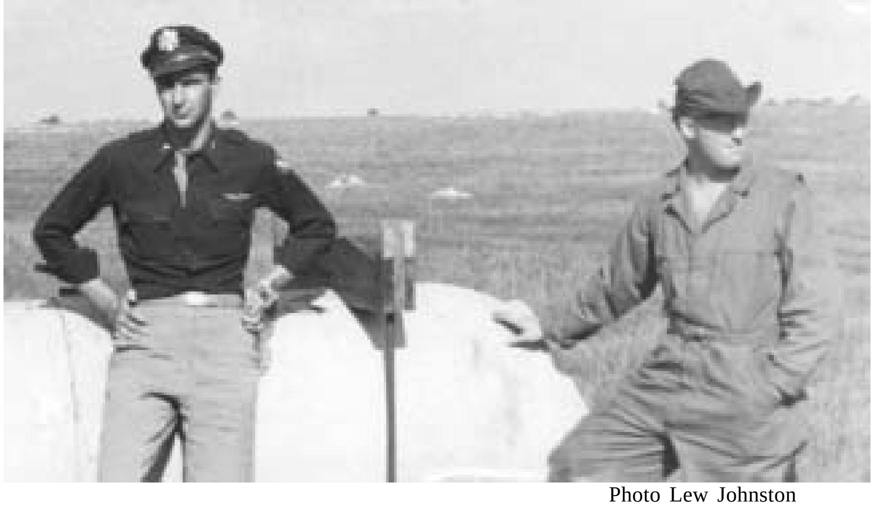


Photo Lew Johnston

Pilot Lew Johnston and Crew Chief (Aerial Engineer) “Bing” Wood beside a German bomb on the airfield at Orleans, France on a resupply mission just after D-Day. Not shown just in front of them is the Turf & Sport Special.

BING'S DIARY

The Chronicles of C-47 #42 92841

Please note: this is only one part of Bing's Diary. It also covers his experiences in the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, Holland, and Germany.

This little bit of history features parts of T/Sgt. "Bing" Wood's personal diary. Bing was the Crew Chief (or Aerial Engineer as he preferred) of the lead aircraft of the 314th Troop Carrier Group. The aircraft was assigned to the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron. The Aircraft Commander was Maj. C. N. Smith, and the pilot was 1st Lt Thomas E. (Ed) Yarbrough. The navigator was 1st Lt Tom Knuckles, the radio operator was S/Sgt. Morris Rubin, and the loadmaster was Sgt. R. P. Bodmer. All were experienced combat crewmembers, having served in Africa, Sicily, and Italy. The aircraft is now restored and on display at The Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.

For those not familiar with the history of this C-47, it entered active service with the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron in World War II, and Bing Wood was it's first 61st Squadron crew chief. Bing kept a diary, and this is the first of a continuing series of entries from that diary. It starts a day ahead of the arrival of the new airplane ferried from the United States by a replacement crew.

The 314th was stationed in the English Midlands, near the small village of Saltby, which was not far from Grantham, which was in turn, not far from Nottingham. Base personnel made many friends in these nearby communities. St. Peters Church in Saltby, for example, was well attended by Americans.

Bing emphasizes right off the bat the special nature of this kind of flying, and of the long hours of training we all endured to learn to do it. And he emphasized again that the airplanes had to be flown in good visibility in very tight formation so that troops and supplies would be dropped together, and in the right place.

"LET'S GO"...said Eisenhower

And so we did

This D-Day Flight Starts At Saltby Army Airfield, England

April 21, 1944 T/Sgt. Bing Wood is speaking

Had a brand new plane assigned to me this morning. It was just flown over from the States, and is of the latest design. That means we will be busy for the next few days giving it a good preliminary check. I'm lucky I have such a good crew. They really cooperate with me, and know their jobs to perfection.

April 25, 1944

Have the plane flying first night we went out on a night training flight—only a few small oil leaks to correct. The last few days I have been grounded. Squadron, Group, and Wing have been busy getting ready for the invasion. The main idea is to get everyone charged and ready to move out on the big day.

May 5-6, 1944

Planes are being added all around; our squadron strength has been greatly increased in the past few days. New crew chiefs have been added as others have been promoted and moved on. Things are different, more efficient. Big things in the works.

Now that the invasion is getting closer, gambling is reaching a new high. The games are getting pretty rough, and ten shillings (two dollars) and pound notes (four dollars) fly around the table like confetti. Pots of over a hundred dollars are no longer a novelty.

May 7-12, 1944

We are just marking time while preparing for the invasion. We have all the planes in good shape, and all the equipment is at hand ready for immediate use. Every day and every night we have Squadron or Group formation flights. Mistakes made during the Sicilian invasion have been analyzed, and most of them have been corrected. All the planes have a new system of lights, and a new series of signals has been learned.

On the 12th, we had a night paradrop exercise—so thorough that at first we thought it was the real thing. The whole field was a beehive of activity. and for the first time, the crews were issued flak suits, flak helmets, and pieces of armor plate. We put the plate under the seats when there was room.

The drop went off perfectly after a five-hour flight. The flak equipment, in addition to the Mae West (floatation jacket) was awkward to wear and heavy as the very devil, so when we landed, I was exhausted. Later, on the actual drop, all of this heavy equipment seemed much lighter when we were being shot at.

May 15-22, 1944

The last week has been pretty rugged; we've been working day and night preparing for the invasion. Night flights, radio checks, and mechanical work have been tough. My plane will lead the squadron, so the radio men and the radar men have been working on the plane almost all the time.

May 30, 1944

A heavy haze has settled over the field, which will probably cancel all flights for the day. I am sitting in the cockpit waiting for the pilots, if there is to be a flight. In front of me, there are a couple thousand paratroopers. They have been here for four days, and they are the ones we will drop in the invasion. We have moved all our equipment from the hangar, and they are using it as a barracks. Straw-filled mattresses cover the floor in orderly rows to make bunks. The hangar is completely encircled with a six-foot barbed wire fence patrolled by armed guards. When the troopers go to the mess hall and back, armed guards ride in the back of each truck.

The paratroopers are constantly exercising with regular sessions of calisthenics three times a day. These guys are going to be completely tired out, or tough as hell when the drop is made. Right now they are digging foxholes, and I can state that they are the fastest diggers I have ever seen. This is the time for them to perfect their techniques. When they leave the plane, they won't have time for any more thinking.

EVERY SO OFTEN THERE IS A DULL BOOM

The plane shudders. These guys are learning to use a new explosive called C2, and from the sound of things, and the shaking plane, I would say that it is pretty rugged stuff.

I'm happy I'm not a paratrooper; I could never stand the gaff. After this war is over, the lives of these paratroopers will be painted in romantic terms, and they will be credited with leading romantic adventurous lives. But from where I sit, I can tell you there is nothing romantic about the routines they are performing out there in front of me.

Just looking at these guys running around in their small caged area does things to me. As far as I can see, it is just damned hard strenuous work. Each drop of sweat is wrung out of the body, and each muscle is tortured to make for more endurance. There is nothing romantic about any of it, but it is still necessary. The better their physical condition when the leave England, the better their chances of survival when they drop into France. Before the invasion of Sicily and Italy, I wasn't too scared, but this time I don't feel so optimistic. This invasion is going to be rough

June 4, 1944

All these days have been spent in intensive prep for the invasion. The whole camp has been restricted again, so this time we know that we are face-to face with the real thing. This isn't more practice; we're all sure that we will take off for the real invasion in a few days.

June 5, 1944

Our instincts were right; rush orders came to load the planes for the big jump. Special orders came to paint the wings and fuselage with alternate black and white stripes for identification purposes. The whole field is a madhouse; everyone has a job to do. Our whole squadron was ordered down to the flight line, swinging paintbrushes and having a real picnic. The crew chiefs and the engineering clerks are having a hard time keeping things running smoothly.

In the middle of all of this activity, the pilots, crew chiefs, and radio operators were called into a briefing session. The powers that be have finally realized that the crew chiefs need to know as much about the jump as the rest of the crew. As we left for the briefing, the assistants were told to do everything necessary to finish the work.

The briefing room buzzed with excitement as we all looked at the different maps on the walls. The room quieted when Col. Clayton Stiles, our Group Commander, took the platform. He opened the session by recalling that we had done magnificent jobs in the airborne invasions of both Sicily and Italy. He praised our spirit of cooperation in following all his orders, and told us that we now faced the biggest job of them all.

Then, the real business of the briefing got under way. The first drop zone was identified as Saint Mere Eglise, a small town on the Cherbourg peninsula of France. The pilots were then given the specified routes to follow—charted for the least amount of flak—based on the known locations of German anti-aircraft batteries.

THE BRIEFING ORDERS

The radio operators were told what frequencies to use in case of emergencies, and warned to maintain radio silence unless absolutely necessary to break it. The Intelligence officers briefed us on security, and told us how to act if we were forced down in enemy territory. They also told us how to contact the French Underground to help us escape. If captured, we were told to give only our name, rank and serial number—nothing else. We were given a general view of the whole operation, escape kits, and French currency.

Our next move was to the supply room for flak suits, helmets, extra supplies, guns and ammunition. We carried all this back to the planes, and placed it where we could get at it easily. The paratroopers arrived in trucks with their equipment, and the crew chiefs helped them place it in the individual bucket seats. A final check was made to see that everything was at hand so there would be no mix-up once we got into the air.

Trucks then took us to chow, and then back to Squadron Engineering to sweat out the word to go. Minute after minute passed, then when it seemed our nerves were about to snap, the invasion was called off for 24 hours due to bad weather. Talk about a letdown.

The flight crews spent an uneasy night and a restless day. As soon as we got back to the barracks, the inevitable poker game started. A few fellows sat on their sacks to write more letters, and the rest tried to read or sleep. We expected to be called at any time, so we spent our time in the barracks, or on the line, giving the planes a last minute check. We held our usual Engineering Meeting, but most of the guys were too preoccupied to pay much attention to the usual everyday things. Most of the crew chiefs told their assistants what to do with their personal stuff if they didn't make it back.

Then at ten o'clock, we were ordered to the flight line for an eleven-thirty takeoff on June 5th. We checked the equipment once more, and the ground crew wished us well. Then they all walked to the end of the runway to watch us takeoff. As we finished our preflight check, the paratroopers arrived for the second time. We handed their chutes out the door and helped them adjust the straps and hook on their equipment. They were as quiet as we were, and just as nervous.

They looked grotesque in the half-light with their blackened faces, and loaded down with all kinds of deadly weapons. Around their belts were bags of hand grenades, revolvers, ammunition, first aid kits, knapsacks, and knives. Their helmets were covered with nets with twigs and leaves stuck in them for camouflage.

There was time for a last cigarette before the pilots arrived. They climbed aboard, and I helped each paratrooper up the three little metal steps into the plane. They were so loaded that I had to pull with all my strength to haul them through the door.

I went up to my spot between the pilots, and gave the instruments one last check. Then in another minute, we moved down the taxi strip behind the lead squadron. As soon as they got airborne, we moved onto the runway, and I looked back to see if the last ship had moved into position. When it was, I tapped the pilot on the shoulder to let him know we were all in place for our take-off at our assigned time. As we started our take off roll, I could see the ground crews waving us *good luck*, and I thought to myself that we were sure going to need it.

GETTING THE GROUP TOGETHER

We circled the field several times to get the whole 314th Group together, and then headed out on our planned course for our drop zone near Saint Mere Eglise. The planes jockeyed around until they were in position, and we settled down for the long ride to the South coast of England. The moon was shining brightly, so we could easily see all the planes in the big formation.

Bombers were flying high over our heads, and we could also see other Troop Carrier Groups heading with us toward the coast. I went back into the cabin several times to speak to the jumpmaster and say a few words of encouragement to the troopers. They had all signed their names on the white field of the blue star on the side of the plane.

Our air cover started to pick us up as we left England, and the fighters were weaving back and forth above us all the way to the drop zone. We flew over surface ships of all kinds, all headed in the same direction we were. More bombers overhead in a seemingly never-ending stream. We made a turn around the city of Cherbourg between two islands that were known to be flak positions. Our bombers had done a good job of taking them out, because we were not fired on.

As our squadron passed between these two islands, we were alerted by light signals to prepare for the drop. I went to my station near the door, put on my headset, and checked communications with the pilot. The formation made a slow swing and headed in toward the southern coastline of the Cherbourg Peninsula. I then helped the troopers hook up to the static line and check their equipment, before going back to my station by the door, and plugging in my headset and microphone.

As we passed over the coastline, the pilot called and told me to tell the jump master that we were over the coastline, and so far had not run into any flak. As I leaned over to tell him, I looked out the door and down at the coastline. I could see the black surf beating on the white beach sand. As I repeated the message, we both leaned out to see better.

The ground seemed to catch fire, and the thunder of guns and exploding shells filled the air all around us. The rank odor of cordite filled the plane as a shower of shrapnel banged against the side. The unexpected flash of the guns, and the rattle of metal against the thin skin startled both the jumpmaster and me, and we both jumped back away from the door and landed in a heap on top of some life rafts. We both looked sheepishly at the other, and went back to our positions at the door. I had to plug the earphones and the microphone back in, since I had torn them loose.

Right after this, we ran into a cloudbank, and the planes scattered like a bunch of hens. It is hard to fly tight formation when you can't see. The red warning light had been on for a few minutes, and as we came out of the cloudbank, the green jump light came on, and the pilot yelled at me to get the troopers out. The jumpmaster looked ghastly in the green light as I tapped him on the shoulder to let him know that it was time to jump.

He gave a yell and sprang out the door, followed by his screaming yelling men. The eighth or ninth trooper (with too much equipment) got stuck in the door, He couldn't get through by himself, and so I kicked him out. As soon as the last one was out, I thumbed the mike, yelled "all clear," and pulled in the static lines.

All hell was breaking loose outside; the roar of exploding shells was deafening. Our plane lurched and headed toward the ground as the pilot made a steep turn and lowered the nose to get flying speed At first, I thought we had been hit, and I was ready to jump out, but with full power at very low altitude, we recovered and started out of there. We could see an awful lot of fighting going on the ground as we flew toward the English Channel.

As we came to the beachhead, we started to climb. The beach was all confusion, and damaged Troop Carrier planes were limping from their drop zones to crash land in the shallow water just offshore.

The radio was filled with calls for help, and the water was filled with rescue boats going to the aid of the stricken planes

Our formation had broken up so that it consisted of only six planes as we swung out over the channel to avoid the antiaircraft batteries that lined the coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula. A couple did open fire on us, but they fell short. Then a few minutes later, a flak ship tried to find us with its searchlights, but didn't have much luck. They were probably just as confused as we were.

The route back was long and tiresome, and our nerves were all shot to pieces. About half way back to the English coast, we spotted a long string of C-47s pulling CG-4A and Horsa gliders toward the landing zones on the continent. We were relieved to be headed home, rather than flying in their direction into action.

The white cliffs of Dover looked very peaceful as we flew over them, and we could relax from our harrowing experience. It was a long dull flight back to Saltby, but we were all anxious to get there to find out the total damage to the Squadron and the Group. We landed OK, checked out the plane rather hurriedly, and reported our experiences to the Intelligence officer (Joe Epstein), and drank our hooker of Old Overholt rye to settle our nerves.

We had a quick meal, and then to the barracks for some well-deserved rest. We slept all day while our assistants readied the planes for the next night's mission. We found out later that we had dropped our troopers right on the nose. Sad to say, not all could say that.

June 7, 1944 – Resupply

During the day, a bunch of combat supply men loaded the planes for a resupply mission. Mine was loaded with six bundles in the parabuckets and carried six bundles in the cabin. These bundles were packed with bazookas, bazooka ammunition, high explosives, and medical supplies. Other planes were variously loaded with food, ammunition, and guns. We checked the load manifest, and then were called to another briefing.

This time it was a much quieter bunch of men that waited for the lectures to start. Three planes were missing from our squadron and the other squadrons had taken an even worse beating. We received much the same talks that we had received before, but this time when they reported on the lightness of the expected flak, there were quite a few raspberries given to show that we thought it was a bunch of bunk.

On this run, we took off at 4:30PM after a special meal. We taxied to the end of the field for takeoff. From there we could see that a wall of fog and haze was moving in to cover the takeoff end of the runway. We took off toward the clear end, and then circled in long sweeps to close up the formation. Planes were immediately blotted out when we ran into the haze and fog at the opposite end of the field. We continued on our slow sweep and soon broke into the clear at the other end of the field. Our wingmen were still in place, but the rest of the squadron was not even close to our lead plane. We made one more turn of the field, then the pilot decided that he would take out on course and let the rest of the planes pick us up later on. It was too dangerous to chance a mid-air collision. Every time we ran into the fog end of the field, everything was blotted out.

We flew for quite some time in the fog, and through the clear patches. I could see that our wingmen were still in place. Down near the coastline we ran into a clear pocket about fifteen miles in circumference, so while the radio operator sent out coded messages giving our position to the rest of the squadron, we made a slow circle of the clear space. After a half-hour of slow circling we had picked up six other planes, so continued on our flight.

This time, instead of cutting down the southern shore of the peninsula, we flew down the north side to make a run straight into our DZ, then make a turn and head out over the same course The radio operator and the radar man were to help me toss out the bundles because the combat supply man had not shown by takeoff. After we reached the water, we arranged the bundles near the door so we could get them out as fast as possible

The air was full of fighters, so we had plenty of air cover. As we flew along our projected route, more and more transports caught up with us and joined the formation. By the time we were ready to make the run in over the beachhead, there were fifteen planes in our formation.

OUT GO THE BUNDLES

Our route took us just far enough out from the French coast so that the shore batteries and the anti-aircraft guns couldn't reach us. At times the hulls of smoldering wrecks could be seen jutting out of the shallow water lining the shore. Inland fires and smoke showed where the front lines were locked in battle. In a few moments we were over Omaha Beach. The radio operator, radar man, and I went to the rear of the plane and took up the positions we had arranged. The planes turned in over the beachhead and headed for the DZ. My position was to the right of the door where I could trip the switches that released the bundles in the parapacks, and at the same time, throw out the first awkward bundle. The first bundle was about five feet long, weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds, and contained a bazooka and ammunition. I figured I'd have a rough job getting that bulky thing out the door and that I probably would have to use both hands and risk falling out myself.

As we passed over the beachhead I could see the terrible destruction. We were flying at four hundred feet, and this time it was daylight, so I could easily see the ground. Equipment was scattered all over the sand. Landing craft were shuttling back and forth between the ships and shore bringing more stuff to add to the huge stockpiles. We went over so fast that I couldn't tell what was wreckage and what was good, but I do know that there was plenty of stuff piled on that short stretch of beach. We got a few quick waves from the men laboring below—then we were gone out over the countryside.

From here on, things get rather confused. Events happened so thick and fast I can't really remember anything coherently. It was just a jumbled mess of quick action and snatches of pictures, some of which I remembered later and a lot that I forgot as soon as I saw it. I remember most vividly the incongruousness of the situation on the ground. This was the infamous hedgerow country of France, so each field, from our point of view, was an individual square. The first square contained a small house and barn. In the next square, a horse and two cows were peacefully grazing. In the shadow of the hedge of the next hedgerow, a couple of tanks and a couple of trucks were partially camouflaged. In the next square, a bunch of men were firing at each other. Right next to them in an open field, a French family was industriously hoeing in their garden. What a war.

THE RED LIGHT FLASHED

The red light flashed on and bullets and flak started slamming and rattling against the side and top of the plane. I yelled at my two helpers to get ready to heave the stuff out. Sweat started streaming down my face and back as I saw a line of machine gun bullets start to peel a line of holes down the wing in the direction of my position near the open door. Anti-aircraft batteries cut loose with an ear-splitting roar; the smell of burnt cordite filled the plane. I glanced at my two helpers and felt a little relieved when they looked just like I felt, their faces were white and showed the evidence of the terrific strain we were under. I got a glimpse of a German tank trying to line us up with his eighty-eight, but we were out of his range before he could fire.

Then there was a terrific flash and the plane shuddered as another plane in our formation received a direct hit and disappeared in a flash of flame and black smoke. The green light flicked on, so I let out a yell, tripped the switch that dropped the parabundles, and in the same motion with a sudden surge of desperate strength, heaved the one-hundred-and-fifty pound bundle out the door as though it were a football. As soon as that was out of the way I joined the radio operator and the radar man with their bundles. We yelled heave, heave, heave as we unloaded the other bundles and boxes to the accompaniment of rattles, bangs, and cracks as stuff hit the plane. In a few seconds we had our load out the door and floating toward the ground. With one quick tug, we hauled the static lines into the plane and called the pilot to get out, that we were all unloaded.

The plane whipped around and the left wing pointed toward the ground as the pilot gave the throttle full range and started out of there fast as hell. As we straightened out, I got a glimpse of a white house that seemed to be on fire from the amount of guns firing from the windows. One gun in particular was sticking out an upstairs window and seemed to be pointing directly at the door in which I was standing. It was spouting flame and I could feel the plane shudder as bullets plowed into the bottom and sides.

The pilot claimed we were doing better than 180 mph as we hurried away from the DZ (drop zone). Our wings were almost brushing the ground as we slid in and around the trees and hedgerows. Suddenly we flashed out over the beach and started to climb out over the bay. It was a pitiful sight to see another C-47 stagger out over the water, then pancake down in a swirl of spray. Planes staggered out on fire and immediately plunged into the water. As we flew out over the bay, I focused my binoculars on the planes coming out of the DZ. Boats in the bay were scuttling to the downed planes, and in some cases, I could see figures struggle out of the escape hatches onto the wings and from there crawl into the rescue boats.

I checked the instruments and everything seemed okay. Then I glanced back through the observation dome and counted eight planes still in formation. We continued back over our prearranged route and in time were back to our home field. The weather was still bad, so we had a little trouble landing at Saltby. We landed okay and turned off the runway. While taxiing, the left engine heated up, so the pilot cut it off and we taxied back to our area on one engine. When we hit the revetment I jumped out to put the pins and locks in and discovered that the underside of the plane was covered with oil. The left nacelle was dripping with oil and the wheel and tire were covered. When I checked further, I found that a bullet had penetrated the oil tank and we had lost most of our supply. We were lucky to make it back with both engines running.

Quite a few planes didn't return, and those that did were badly shot up. A lot of men were wounded, and those not wounded were in a bad nervous state. Planes from other squadrons were coming in for landings and several were firing red flares to show that they had wounded personnel on board. These landed first while the other planes circled.

We were taken to a briefing. The squadron physician was there to give us our one drink—strictly for medicinal purposes. The name of each recipient was carefully checked so he couldn't chisel two. I got two, as my radar man didn't drink. The liquor didn't quiet my nerves a bit, but it did give me a good appetite. We finished our stories and ate chow. Several beds in the barracks were going to be empty after this day's mission, and we all avoided looking at the empty spaces while we readied ourselves for the sack.

June 8, 1944

Plane grounded for repairs. *Turf and Sport Special* was in pretty bad shape. An explosive shell had hit the left engine firewall and blown a large hole in this metal safety guard, and at the same time splattered lead through the cowling and oil tank. We were lucky that the hole in the oil tank was small and only allowed a small bit of oil to escape. Another of our planes was so badly damaged that it wouldn't fly, so we removed our oil tank and exchanged it for the one on the crippled ship.

Depot repairmen replaced a stringer in the tail section and replaced supports in the wing. We fixed the firewall and cowling ourselves. After we finished patching and daubing the holes with paint, the outside of the plane was well speckled with patches. As we worked on the damage, we found out how close we had come to getting knocked off, that is the three of us, because we were all in about the same position when the plane was hit. Machine gun bullets are fixed in rotation, first an armor-piercing bullet, an explosive bullet, then an incendiary bullet, or some such order. An incendiary bullet came through the flaps, penetrated the floor, hit the ceiling, and fell back to the floor. An armor-piercing bullet came through the right side of the plane, missed my head and helmet by about an inch, and went through the side of the plane. The next in the series, an explosive bullet, hit back of the toilet, blew out a stringer, and plastered the sidewall full of holes. Just jumble up the series of bullets a little and the three of us would have had it.

OTHER PLANES DOWN

We had reports on a couple of planes that were missing. One of the planes had had an engine shot out and the fuel pump on the other gave out, so the crew chief, radio operator, and navigator took turns at the wobble pump all the way across the channel. They landed on the nearest available field in England. The pilot and crew did a hell of a good job to even get it back to England because it was inspected and declared unsafe to fly, so they left it there for junking. Another plane was badly battered and had landed on another emergency field. The crew chief had been hit on the flak vest by a direct burst of an explosive bullet. The vest turned aside the worst of the explosion, but small particles had entered his stomach where the vest tied together. The wound didn't seem serious, but he was hospitalized for weeks and almost died

Bing Wood, the author of this diary, was a horse-racing enthusiast. He named his airplane *TheTurf and Sport Special* after a popular racing magazine.

The Turf and Sport Special

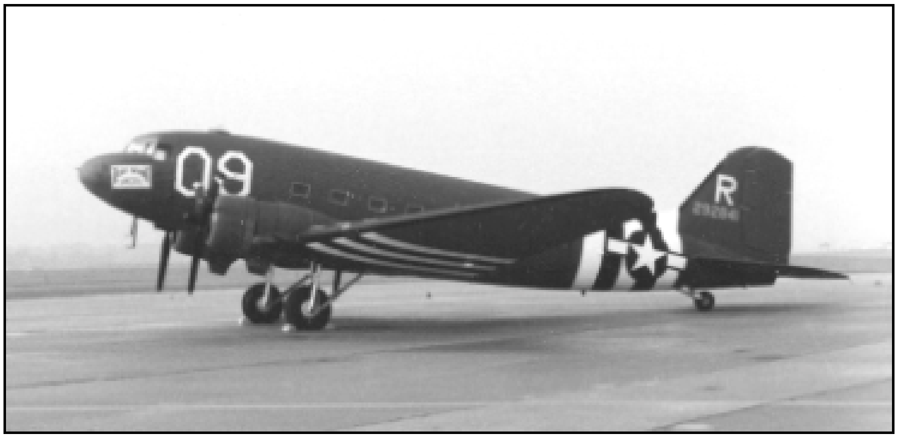


Photo AMC Museum

C-47 # 42-92841

NOTE: The C-47 described in Bing's diary has been restored, and is on display at the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. It was plucked from a storage area where it was waiting to be taken away and used as target material. It had already seen service as a training load for helicopter crews learning to pick up crashed or downed aircraft for transport to their bases for salvage or repair.

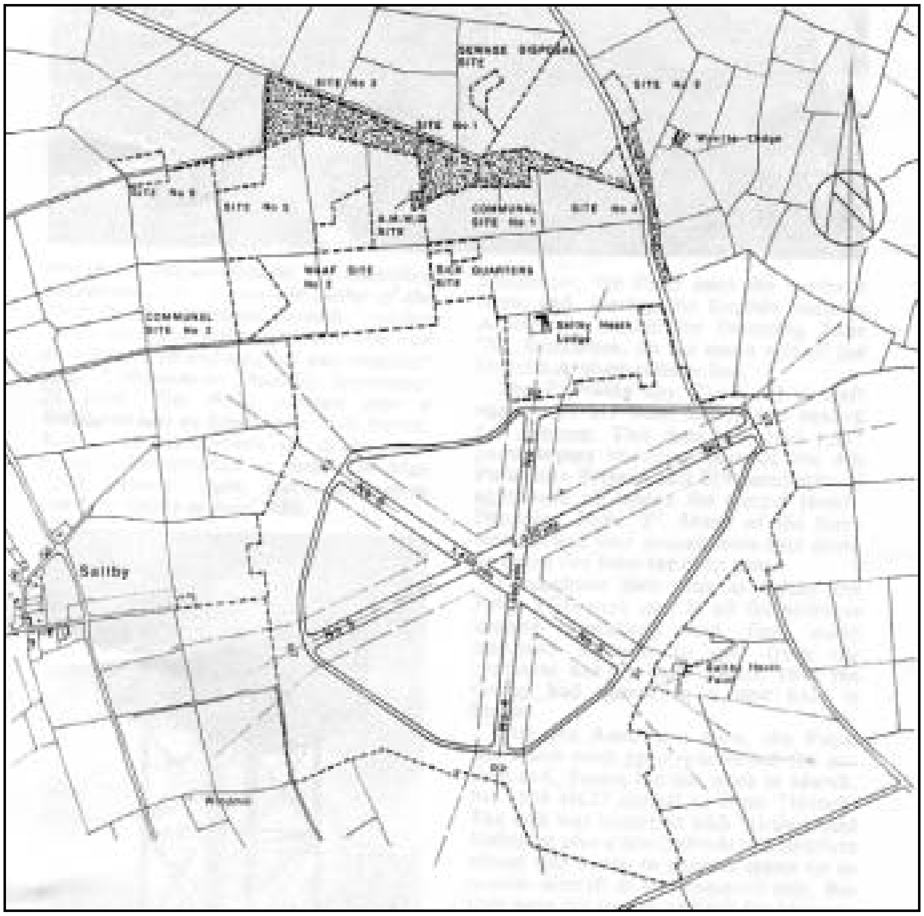
The high point of this restoration was a visit by Crew Chief Bing Wood. The museum director, Michael Leister, asked Bing if he could identify the aircraft for sure. His response was: "I can if I can get inside," and when he climbed the ladder, he looked at the floor, and then the top, and said: "This is it."

When asked how he knew so quickly, Bing pointed to some patches in the floor and ceiling, and told us all that the German bullet had also passed through the bucket seat he had just vacated to check some lines. Bing has since died, but the airplane is on display at Dover.

Crew of 292841, D-Day Normandy 6 June 1944

Maj. C. N. Smith, A/C Commander
1st Lt. T. E. Yarbrough, Pilot
1st Lt. T. C. Knuckles, Navigator
T/Sgt. "Bing" Wood, Crew chief
S/Sgt. Morris Rubin, Radio operator
Sgt. R. P. Bodmer, Loadmaster

SALTBY AIRFIELD (Leicestershire) – USAAF Station 538. This was the point of departure of *Turf & Sport* on D-Day Normandy—and a typical Troop Carrier base in England


SEWAGE DISPOSAL SITE
COMMUNAL SITE No 1
SICK QUARTERS SITE
COMMUNAL SITE No 2
Saltby Heath Lodge
Saltby
Saltby Heath Farm

Courtesy Action Stations 2

Saltby airfield is located just east of the small Leicestershire village of the same name. On December 18th 1943, it became USAAF station 538, allocated to the 9th Air Force, Troop carrying Command, and in February 1944, the 314th TCG. moved to prepare for the invasion of mainland Europe. The unit was already an experienced fighting force, having already seen action in North Africa and the Sicilian and Italian landings

On June 5th 1944, the eve of D-Day, 1007 men of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, loaded with ammunition and equipment were readied for the impending invasion. Their destination was to be Drop Zone “N”, north east of Ranville. The campaign was to begin in the early hours of the following day, as they arrived over mainland Europe in their C-47s. And after the initial insertion into France, the 314th completed many supply missions from Saltby.

A British system of letter/number codes to identify the Groups and Squadrons of all aircraft flying over England

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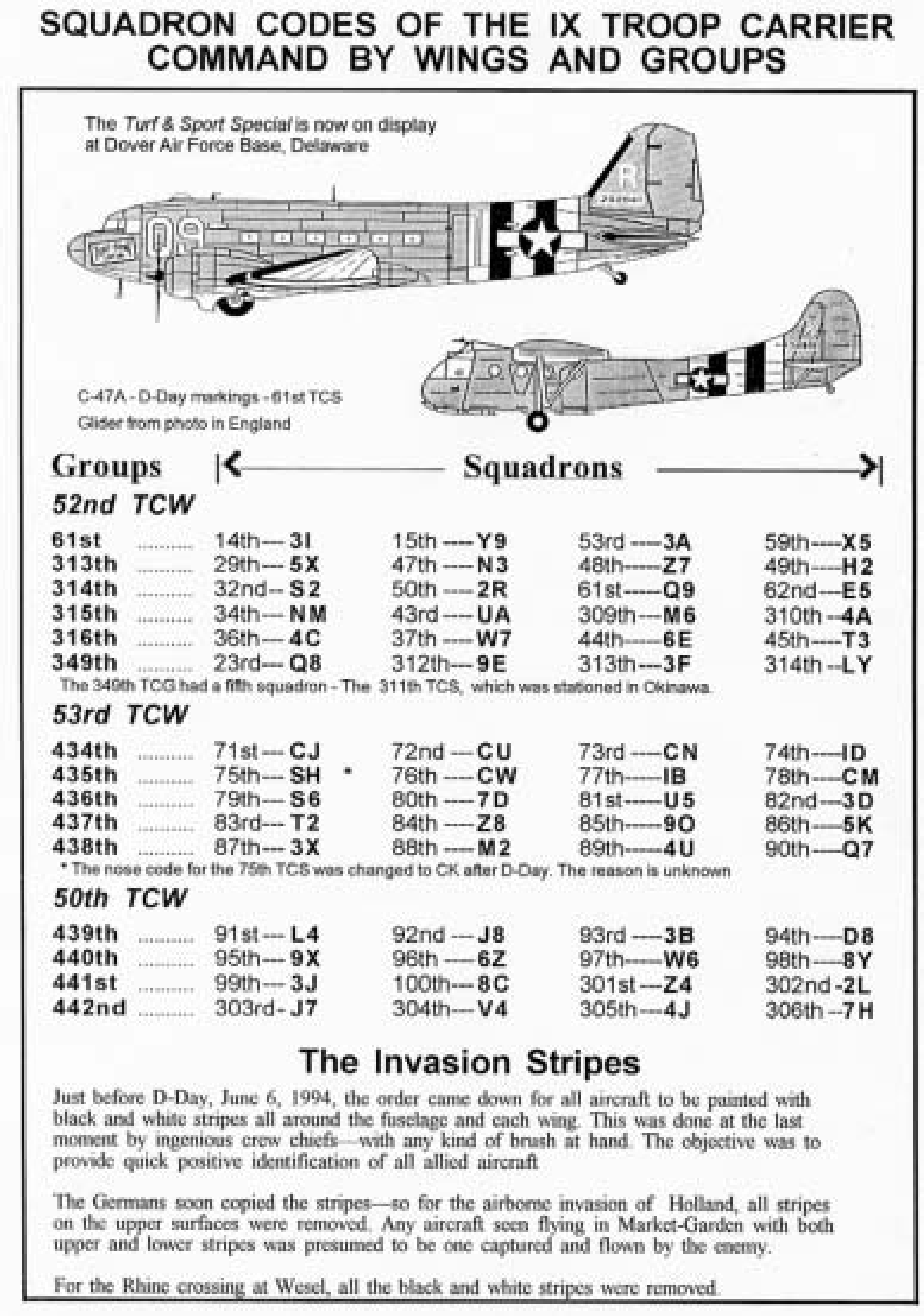


SQUADRON CODES OF THE IX TROOP CARRIER COMMAND BY WINGS AND GROUPS

The *Turf & Sport Special* is now on display
at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware

C-47A - D-Day markings - 61st TCS
Glider from photo in England

Groups	|← Squadrons →|		
52nd TCW				
61st	14th--- **3I**	15th ---- **Y9**	53rd ---- **3A**	59th---- **X5**
313th	29th--- **5X**	47th ---- **N3**	48th----- **Z7**	49th---- **H2**
314th	32nd-- **S2**	50th ---- **2R**	61st----- **Q9**	62nd--- **E5**
315th	34th--- **NM**	43rd ---- **UA**	309th--- **M6**	310th -- **4A**
316th	36th--- **4C**	37th ---- **W7**	44th----- **6E**	45th---- **T3**
349th	23rd--- **Q8**	312th--- **9E**	313th--- **3F**	314th -- **LY**

The 349th TCG had a fifth squadron - The 311th TCS, which was stationed in Okinawa.

53rd TCW				
434th	71st --- **CJ**	72nd --- **CU**	73rd ---- **CN**	74th---- **ID**
435th	75th--- **SH** *	76th ---- **CW**	77th----- **IB**	78th---- **CM**
436th	79th--- **S6**	80th ---- **7D**	81st----- **U5**	82nd--- **3D**
437th	83rd--- **T2**	84th ---- **Z8**	85th----- **9O**	86th---- **5K**
438th	87th--- **3X**	88th ---- **M2**	89th----- **4U**	90th---- **Q7**

* The nose code for the 75th TCS was changed to CK after D-Day. The reason is unknown

50th TCW				
439th	91st --- **L4**	92nd --- **J8**	93rd ---- **3B**	94th---- **D8**
440th	95th--- **9X**	96th ---- **6Z**	97th----- **W6**	98th---- **8Y**
441st	99th--- **3J**	100th--- **8C**	301st --- **Z4**	302nd - **2L**
442nd	303rd- **J7**	304th--- **V4**	305th --- **4J**	306th -- **7H**

The Invasion Stripes

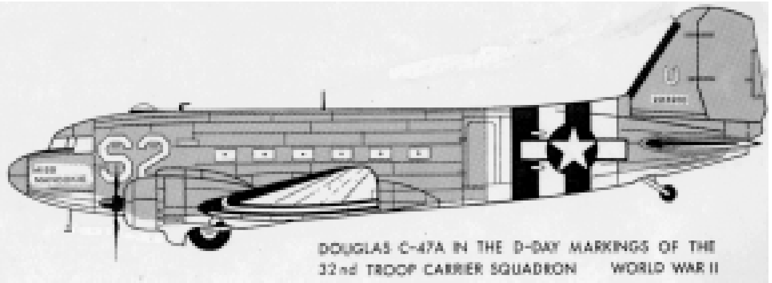
Just before D-Day, June 6, 1994, the order came down for all aircraft to be painted with black and white stripes all around the fuselage and each wing. This was done at the last moment by ingenious crew chiefs—with any kind of brush at hand. The objective was to provide quick positive identification of all allied aircraft

The Germans soon copied the stripes—so for the airborne invasion of Holland, all stripes on the upper surfaces were removed. Any aircraft seen flying in Market-Garden with both upper and lower stripes was presumed to be one captured and flown by the enemy.

For the Rhine crossing at Wesel, all the black and white stripes were removed.

THE VIEW FROM THE COCKPIT

How the beaches and drop zones looked from the pilot's seat



DOUGLAS C-47A IN THE D-DAY MARKINGS OF THE 32nd TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON WORLD WAR II

Drawing: Lew Johnston

To the thousands of Troop Carriers, the first hint of the big day was the rigid closing of the airbases by security personnel. No one could enter, and no one could leave. These restrictions were absolute. Then on May 30, 1944, the troops of the 82nd Airborne Division moved onto our airfield, and they set up camp for themselves behind barbed wire.

D-Day was originally scheduled for June 5. In preparation for this mission, all Allied airplanes had 24-inch white and black stripes painted at the wing roots and at the rear of the fuselage—a crude rush job at the last minute. These stripes were planned to identify allied planes quickly. The lessons of Sicily had been learned well.

The weatherman predicted atrocious weather on the 5th, and although the crews were prepared to go, General Eisenhower ordered a 24-hour delay. Thus we left our base late on the 5th of June and dropped the paratroops of the 82nd Airborne Division in early morning of June 6, 1944.

OFF TO FLATBUSH

On D-Day, the airplanes of each segment of the American airborne invasion force flew their assigned routes to the Troop Carrier Command departure point, code named FLATBUSH, and then they flew out over the waters of the English Channel as they headed south for the coast of France. The unlighted C-47's soon came in sight of the English islands, Alderney and Guernsey, which were held by the German armies. Here the crews saw their first flak, but it fell short, as they had been told it would.

After crossing the coast of the Cotentin Peninsula, the various Troop Carrier Groups took up courses for their respective Drop Zones. The whole crossing took five hours, and there were patches of low clouds and fog, which were changing throughout that time. This broke up many of the formations, but others were able to fly on as briefed. The lead aircraft of the 314th Troop Carrier Group carried the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. General Gavin and Colonel Roy Lindquist were in the lead airplane

On D-Day, Blake Craig and Bob Freeman (left) were the crew for Lts. vanReken and Cohen (center). On D+2, Charles Schloser and Raymond Layfield were the crew for the same pilots

A Pilot from the 32nd Troop Carrier Squadron tells us how it was. The narrator is Harvey Cohen. The airplane is # 43-30715.

"As we walked into the briefing room, there was an undercurrent of nervous chatter throughout the room as the crews looked at the large map and observed the course. Could that be our Drop Zone? We had guessed wrong—thought it would be Calais! How long would we be over land? How much ack-ack did they have? Will we drop at night or during the day? How long would the flight be? A thousand questions were flying around the room. The briefing answered them all.

"First we were introduced to the Commanding Officer of the American Airborne troops and he explained his Battalion's particular mission and then the general strategy for the invasion armies. Two great armies were to strike in France and the men we were to carry were to spearhead the attack. We were all amazed at the immensity of our own part in the invasion. Troop Carrier planes would be dropping airborne troops for five whole hours!

"The briefing continued about how we were to form, the navigational aids along our course, the weather forecast for the route, the disposition of enemy troops and their antiaircraft defenses, the alternate airports for use in emergency, ditching procedure, methods of escape and evasion in case we were shot down, and even the clothing and equipment we should carry. Nothing was left to chance as we filed out of the briefing room.

THAT OLD DEVIL WEATHER

We were ready to go, but because of weather conditions, the mission was postponed for 24 hours. All of us congregated at the Officers' Club to discuss this latest development. Generally we felt let down. The boys made wisecracks that 'Heinrich' had not had enough time to prepare for our coming and that was the reason for the postponement. Yet, despite the apparent jolly attitude of the men, we all felt worried because of the delay. What if the news leaked out? These thoughts pervaded the atmosphere all the next day until the time came when we reported to the planes. This time we were going!

The troopers in our plane, chalk No. 41, were relaxing in the cabin when we boarded the plane. They asked me how high they would be dropped from, the speed the plane would be flying, and how many planes would be behind us. I tried to reassure them by telling them I would slow the plane to 100 mph, and that there were no planes directly behind us so they had no worries on that score. I went over the ditching procedures again and wished them "Godspeed", and told them I'd treat for a drink in Paris."

I made a final check with my crew chief, T/Sgt. Blake E. Craig of Elkton, Michigan, and my radio operator, Sgt. Robert M. Freeman of Bellaire, Ohio. I put on my parachute harness and Mae West (life preserver) and took my place. We started our engines and followed our lead plane to the takeoff position. It is hard to describe the feelings I had as I taxied my plane past our operations and jerked my thumb up to the men standing there.

Within a few minutes we were gathering speed as we moved down the runway and then we were airborne and moving into position on the right wing of our element. After circling while we formed, we started on our course—sixty airplanes in two serials, carrying 950 men to France.

It was easy flying as we followed the course marked by plainly visible beacons—like a highway across the face of England. We left the land and started across the Channel to France. At this point I went back and put on my flak suit. Below us we saw the first ship, and I felt once more the greatness of this combined operation. At this point we also saw the first planes coming back. They appeared scattered and I became apprehensive. They must have met a great deal of ack-ack.

TWENTY MINUTES TO GO

Soon we were turning towards land on the last leg before the run-in to the Drop Zone. I sent my crew chief to the rear of the plane to give a 20-minute warning to the paratroopers. Then I adjusted my flak helmet. At this time we noticed the Island of Guernsey on our right—our first glimpse of enemy territory. I felt a hard knot in my stomach, similar to the feeling one has before the opening kickoff in a football game. I closed in tightly on my lead plane, observing that a bank of clouds lay over the Cherbourg Peninsula where we would cross the coast.

Glancing at my instrument panel, I checked all my instruments carefully, remarking to my co-pilot that we would have to lose 1,200 feet before reaching the Drop Zone, to get down to the drop altitude of 700 feet. Soon we were over the coast heading toward the cloud layer and some scattered fire coming from the right. It was then our flight plunged into the clouds and I was pressed to follow my element leader who made a diving right turn.

The next few minutes seemed to fly by. My element leader and I had become separated from the main formation and I was chasing him through the clouds. We had given our troopers the warning red light, when I sighted large amber “T” identifying the Drop Zone about 4 miles to our left. The lead plane must have seen it because he turned toward it and within a few seconds was dropping his troops. I chopped the throttles and gave the troopers the ***GO*** signal.

Then I followed him as he dove to the 'deck’ and headed toward the coast. He was turning wildly to evade machine-gun fire coming up from both sides. Following him, I was caught in the crossfire, and although I kicked and turned the plane violently, I was caught in it for what seemed like an hour. I felt the ship get hit and then smelled smoke, and I yelled for the crew chief to check the damage and to the co-pilot to check the instruments. By this time we were over the water and headed for England. I stayed above the water for some time paralleling the land, especially when we watched the strong flak and machine-gun fire coming from what should have been Cherbourg.

CHECK THE DAMAGE

Within a few minutes we started climbing to 3000 feet and I turned the plane over to the copilot in order to check the damage. We had received a 20mm burst just behind the cargo door and the rear cargo section had approximately 30 bullet holes. This had been the crew chief's station at the time of the drop, but luckily, Craig had just moved forward. Returning to the cockpit, I noticed several other groups heading towards France, and then passed two large glider trains. Again I was impressed with the large part the Troop Carrier Command was playing in the invasion.

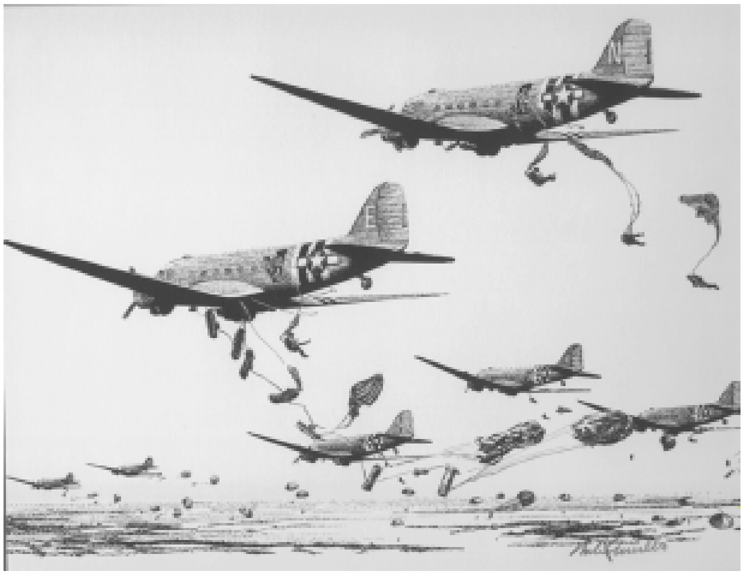
The planning for D-Day, in retrospect, seems incredible. The airborne segment alone, which is the only part being considered here, was awesome. All the thousands of men and machines had to be moved about, many from the USA, and all of them had to be at assigned locations at specific times.

In the case of Troop Carrier, with its function of dropping paratroops, this involved working backwards from the time of the planned paratroop drop, in our case at 0214 on the 6th of June. The route of each unit had to be plotted and the number of miles had to be accurately determined so that calculations at prescribed air speeds. (C-47's carrying paratroops at 140 miles per hour) could be made. Still working backwards, each of the Groups, which came from three different Wing areas in England, had to be over checkpoints at specific times so that there would not be several Groups flying through an airspace at the same time. And, working still further back, the takeoff times and the assembly times had to be determined for each squadron of each group.

Before all these events could take place, there had to be the fueling and last minute maintenance of hundreds of airplanes. All the aircrews had to be briefed on the details (e.g. flying in V of Vs, drop speed of 110 mph, return speed of 150 mph, no evasive action over the Drop Zone) and the scope of the entire mission. They also had to be fed. At the same time the paratroops had to leave their own barracks areas and had to be moved to various Troop Carrier bases. These men too had to be fed and provided with facilities for personal needs, so that they could assemble equipment, and arrange the loading of the airplanes, including the parapacks on the underside of the plane.”

All of these matters and concerns were planned with great accuracy. The planning and logistics of the D-Day invasion were incredible—and good. The problems of the resupply mission on June 7, 1944, D+1, were caused, not by the planning, but by the weather.

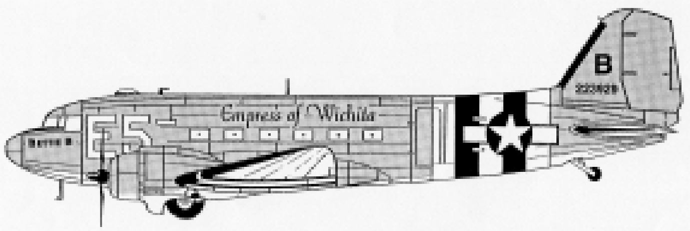
The officers who commanded the paratroops were aware of the problems of Troop Carrier aircrews and very soon after D-Day, wrote letters of appreciation to the Commanding General of Troop Carrier Command. Excerpts of these letters appear later here.



Artist’s rendering of a “daylight paradrop.” I found this on the internet. The artist’s name is illegible. I would happily credit him or her, if I could read it.

Purists will point out that the paratroopers are closer together in the air than they would have actually been—and that it is not likely that the paratroopers and the bundles would be dropped at the same instant.

The Co-pilot
D-Day 1944



DOUGLAS C-47A IN THE D-DAY MARKINGS OF THE 62nd TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON WORLD WAR II

4/30/02

The original story came from a D-Day Co-pilot of the 62nd Troop Carrier Squadron, 314th Troop Carrier Group, who chose to keep his identity to himself as he wrote it. This undoubtedly added a bit of interest, and I left it that way until the end—then I tell you who it is. And it isn't hard to see that the mystery writer was not only an experienced Troop Carrier pilot, but also a vital American with a fine sense of humor. I left that in too.

This, by the way, is the only narrative view of the D-Day flights by a Co-pilot that I know of. It is also unique in its candid descriptions of the human side of everyday life in a Troop Carrier squadron.

The original report was in two parts—the following one about the Co-pilot and his experiences and feelings—and the other about the flight of Captain Charles Cartwright and his crew on the same mission. Both are interesting, but since Cartwright's flight has already been documented earlier in the Intelligence Report, it has not been repeated. Please refer to page 49 of *The Troop Carrier D-Day Flights*. The Co-pilot's background information also applies.

Our Co-pilot starts his story at the end of a weeklong stay at an Army Air Forces rest home in southern England. He, and two pilots from the 32nd Troop Carrier Squadron, and one from the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron were waiting for transportation back to Saltby. They talked about the upcoming invasion. They had not been moved from the Mediterranean to England for nothing; and even the newest pilots had eleven hundred hours of flying time, 700 of it overseas. They also had two invasions for experience, and the never-ending night training formations since March. They were ready and able—willing too—although no one looks forward to being shot at. It was their duty, and they would have missed it with mixed emotions had D-Day occurred while they were in the rest area.

The same weather that could prevent the occasion of D-Day was keeping the C-47 that would come for them on the ground at Saltby. The long train ride back was boring, but the Co-pilot was going home to his friends and the only family he had known in the three years with the Army Air Forces. He thought about making a run to town, but that would have to wait until the next day. No flying was scheduled, the guys on the flight line were busy putting on the pararacks and painting black and white stripes on the wings and fuselages.

June 2nd was not a day to go down in history, unless you count the promotion of the Co-pilot to 1st Lt. He was invited to attend the promotion party for Major Wilson at the Senior Officers Mess. No one noticed that the Co-pilot was wearing borrowed silver bars but he enjoyed the meal, and they do have a better supply of Scotch at Group. Great evening, but he really had planned on going to town. Oh well, the girls can wait another day.

Damn! June 3rd arrived and so did the MPs; they're all over the place. Everyone is restricted and will attend the briefing. They must be getting serious, checking the roster and ID's when going into the briefing, lines on the map going south and then east to that little peninsula. Time, course, altitude, 62nd will lead the Group; Col. Stiles will fly lead ship to Drop Zone "N" and the 314th will be followed by the 313th Group from Folkingham. It's called the Cotentin Peninsula, a part of Normandy, and it's all laid out on a sand table. The Co-pilot never saw one of these before, but he's heard about them. Here's the route past the Channel Islands, Guernsey and Jersey. Germans there. Remember that Granddad had cows by that name. Must be where his cows came from. Ah Ha! The Initial Point is on the shoreline, and there's our Drop Zone. Nearest town is Ste Mere-Eglise. Never heard of it.

The crews returned to squadron operations, and in checking the aircraft assignments, the Co-pilot was just a little miffed to see that Ray Roush, Operations Officer, had him in the right seat of 074 with Glenn Grimes as Pilot, Vic Palumbo, Navigator, Billy Hensley, Crew Chief, and Emanuel Wodinsky, Radio Operator. The Co-pilot was wondering why Ray assigned him to fly right seat considering he was a brand new First Lieutenant. Two Second Lieutenants were assigned as pilots. Three others had not made First Pilot until after he had, way back in Kairoun. Must have done something that teed off his good friend Ray Roush. It was true that he arrived at operations a little late some days. He did take advantage of their friendship—not a few times but on a regular basis he tested the friendship to the limit. He knew it would do no good to complain. Ray Roush would not change the assignment and Major Tappan would back Ray all the way, and he and Grimes were flying Tap's right wing.

ALL EXPERIENCED PEOPLE UP FRONT

That's it, Tap or Ray decided that there should be four experienced people in the two aircraft flying formation with Major Tappan. Some of the others had newly assigned pilots with less time and no combat experience. Maybe Ray was looking after the Co-pilot as well, and wanted to make sure that he had good people together at critical positions. Sure, that's why P.J. Warren is flying with Tap. One of the best, that P.J. Same thinking went into the assignments on the lead element. Col. Stiles has Downhill and Poling. Suppose Flight Leaders are expendable; they have one experienced pilot per wing while leading an element. What the hell, if the Co-pilot has to fly with someone, it might as well be G.(Boliver) Grimes.

Nothing to do now but wait. The airborne forces have yet to arrived; we have the 82nd again. Dropped 505th and the 504th in Sicily and Italy; wonder who we will have on this trip. Kind of funny, the Air Force gets paid extra for flying, paratroops get paid extra for jumping. They don't like airplanes but have to use them to do their job. The crewmembers want no part of jumping out of airplanes if there is any chance of a safe landing. Takes all kinds of people and everyone thinks he has the best deal.

The word is that the mission is on for tomorrow night—take off late on June 4th. That will make D-Day on 5th. Might as well hit the sack, long day tomorrow, and a longer night.

The Co-pilot could sleep in any day of the week. The best days were when the weather was bad and no flying. The other days started with Paul Cook opening the door, calling out names and announcing breakfast at six, flight line at seven. So what was the Co-pilot doing awake at the crack of dawn with no place to go. Of all the days that he could use a little extra sack time, he's wide-awake. Might as well get dressed and go to the mess hall.

The mess hall, shared with the 50th Squadron, was not only full and buzzing with conversation, but there was a long line. The line moved a bit slower today, fresh eggs any way you wanted them, sunny side up, over easy or burn 'em. The Co-pilot observed that rations improved when missions were scheduled. Was it the fresh eggs that brought everyone to the mess hall, or was it the excitement of D-Day?

The 62nd Operations was full. The pilots were checking the board for changes in personnel or flight position. All the same as yesterday. Some of the pilots were giving Capt. Roush a hard time for not scheduling himself. They just wanted to make him explain again that when Major Tappan was on a mission, he had to remain behind—can't take a chance of losing all the good men at once. "We understand that, Ray, but how come you are not going on the mission?"

1st Lt. Richard D. Stevens had been a Flight Leader since l June. He was not scheduled to fly while the other two newly appointed Flight Leaders, Don Broaddus and Ed Bohnsack were leading elements. "How come you're not going, Steve?" "Because that damn Roush won't change the schedule. Doc put me in the hospital for nothing, and they set up the flights while I was gone. All I had was an ingrown hair in the wrong place."

JESSIE "JIGGS" RUSSELL PAINTS THE STRIPES

Out on the flight line, Master Sergeant Jessie Russell was checking with the crew chiefs to make certain that all aircraft were ready and that the invasion stripes were well covered. Communications Chief Bill Watson was also on the job, making sure those radios work. Even if we had "radio silence", they have to be in working order. Most important is the navigation system.

June 4th is dragging on. The weather is not the best. Possible postponement of the invasion. Eighteen 62nd Glider Pilots have been sent to the 53rd Troop Carrier Wing based in the group of fields west of London. Ramsbury, Membury, Welford, Greenham Common and Aldermasten. Flight Officer Louis H. Zeidenschneider, about 5'6", 120 pounds when wet, was in this group. No one called him Louis or Lou. Few or any knew what the "H" stood for; he was just Zeidenschneider—a friendly little guy looking for a poker game or a crap game.

The Co-pilot was relieved, but only for a moment, when word was passed that the invasion was postponed 24 hours. Another long day and evening, he would just as soon get it over with and if all went well, the restriction would be lifted and he could enjoy the social life in Nottingham.

For the first part, June 5th, 1944 was much the same as yesterday and the day before that, except that the sun was shining. The hours slipped by and the Co-pilot fund himself again at Operations hoping someone might have been removed from flying for any reason and he would find an empty left seat. No such luck. Glenn Grimes and all the crewmembers were checking the aircraft and watching the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment get their equipment on. Must be a hundred or more pounds on each. Some have a spare chute, some don't?

THE COLONEL STARTS THE TAKE OFF RUN

June 5 was 23 hours and 20 minutes old when Col. Clayton Stiles released the brakes and started rolling. The two wingmen on either side rolled with him as the other element leaders followed with their three aircraft. Nine aircraft would be rolling or airborne by the time Col. Stiles cleared the taxiway 6,000 feet on the other side of the Saltby Army Air Base. Without interrupting the timing or spacing, Major Arthur Tappan followed with the second nine aircraft of the 62nd.

The Co-pilot watched the airspeed, pulled the wheels up, adjusted the cowl flaps and milked the wing flaps up while keeping a lookout for other aircraft. Grimes flew formation; Palumbo unfolded his charts; Hensley watched and listened to the engines, and Wodinsky tuned in to the static.

Col. Stiles was checking with Lt. Col. Thomas Shanley, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, as Fred Evans made a wide slow turn to allow the other elements of the 314th to catch the first nine. The pilots had done this so often that it took no more than ten minutes from take off till they were a tight group of 60 Gooneybirds. Easy with all the lights on—navigation, formation and the amber recognition. Fred fell in five minutes behind the 315th Group and maintained 133 miles per hour ground speed and 1,500 feet altitude to the Severn River.

Not much for the Co-pilot to do: keep his eye on the gauges; watch the formation ahead and an occasional light on the ground. He tightened the parachute straps and watched the English Channel approach as the formation descended to 500 feet. The Co-pilot decided it was a good time to use the biffy; and made his way to the tail. It was a nice smooth ride and the 508th troopers were relaxed, talking and for once, not airsick. On the way back to the cockpit the Co-pilot climbed up and looked out the astrodome. What a view in the moonlight! C-47's as far as he could see to the front and rear. Hundreds of them and this is just from the 52nd Wing. Strapped himself in again and reminded Grimes that it was time to turn off the navigation lights. Grimes nodded OK.

FLATBUSH and HOBOKEN—BUT NOT NEW YORK

The next 56 miles from Flatbush, the Marine Lighthouse on the Isle of Portland, would take the Co-pilot to two ships in the Channel marked with a green signal light. Somewhere in this area, Capt. Clyde "Pappy" Taylor was now on board a ship with crew and members of the Pathfinder troops that had departed North Witham with eight other aircraft. Pappy was bumped by one of the other Pathfinders and required to ditch—the only 62nd crew that did not complete their mission. Made sense to Pappy that if you had to put it in the water, land close to a ship. They never even got their feet wet. Fortunately, there were three planes assigned to each Drop Zone by the First Pathfinder Group to arrive 30 minutes ahead of the main body.

Col. Stiles made the 90-degree left turn at Hoboken and the Co-pilot watched the amber recognition lights being turned off, as they started the run to the Initial Point. Just off the right wing the Co-pilot could see the channel islands of Guernsey and Jersey in the bright moonlight.

A little over two hours into the mission, a minimum of conversation had been exchanged between members of the crew. Navigator Lt. Victor Palumbo had been keeping his log on time and distance and was now standing between the pilots. His first combat flight, Vic had questions as he looked at the closest of the Channel Islands. "Why don't they shoot?" The Co-pilot had no answer but was content with the fact that they were out of range of the fifties and perhaps too low for the heavy anti-aircraft. The cloud bank at the Initial Point that would scatter later formations, drew the well disciplined crews of the 62nd and other squadrons of: the 314th together as they closed formation, the better to see the nine little blue formation lights. Grimes stayed close to Major Tappan as they descended and found clear visibility moments later in the moonlight.

VIEW FROM THE RIGHT SEAT, THE BEST IN THE HOUSE

Vic Palumbo's question was answered as the Co-pilot watched and became absorbed with how slow the tracers rose from the ground and then suddenly went by quickly out of sight. The view from the right seat is the best in the house; you can see it all, as Major Tappan would approach a line of fire and quickly rise over the tracers. When Tap went up, Grimes would go under. So far so good, but the real problem is the five rounds in between each little red ball and those red balls are close together. Five hundred feet is not a good altitude when you are dodging hostile ground fire. Troop Carrier Command always referred to "hostile fire" in the General Orders, or in the awarding of air medals and other decorations. They also used the terms, unarmed, unarmored, unescorted. The Co-pilot had time to think about a lot of things between the Initial Point to the Drop Zone.

The 508th had been standing and ready since the Initial Point; they were more than willing to get out of that airplane and on the ground where they could shoot back. The Co-pilot was relieved to see the lighted "T" on the ground and the formation was slowing to a hundred and five. One problem—several guns are holding their fire steady over the Drop Zone and waiting for us to fly through. The Co-pilot had his hand on the switch for the green light while watching the troops leave the first nine aircraft. If that "T" is in the right place, the troopers will be on target. The Co-pilot looked at his watch—2:08AM—flipped the green light and counted the troops as he felt each step out the door. After number nine went out, the parapack loads were released.

Only seconds had elapsed when he realized that all the troops were out of the first nine planes except for Charlie Cartwright, who was leading the right element. Charlie's wingmen went for the deck and he made a right turn and had his navigation lights on. The Co-pilot was still counting the last of the paratroops and watching Charlie make a one-eighty and the tracers were following him and not firing on the rest of the formation. Charlie flew out of sight and Grimes hit the throttles and headed for the deck, and the beach, and the water. All of the eight planes in front were out of sight.

All the Co-pilot wanted now was to cross that beach and get out over the water. One problem suddenly appeared, a large dark dome, a pillbox on the coast. Grimes kicked rudder and flew around it. "Got it made," thought the Co-pilot, when a sudden bright flash filled the cockpit.

The Co-pilot, not knowing the condition of Grimes' night vision, grabbed the controls and pulled for altitude. As their vision returned, Grimes and the Co-pilot looked at each other and asked if the other was all right. Satisfied that Grimes was not injured, the Co-pilot relaxed his grip on the controls, placed his hands in his lap and found a small knob. He wondered what this was from and then realized that it was off the altimeter. Looked to his left at the hole in front of Grimes and discovered there was no altimeter. Checking the rest of the instruments, he found only that one tachometer was out and that all engine instruments were indicating normal operation. No problem, half the fuel remained and a shorter route to Saltby and lots of airfields in between.

During the 45-minute flight from Utah Beach to checkpoint Gallup, where they would turn north to the coast of England, the Co-pilot noticed that his left foot inside of the paratroop boots was warm and wet. He reached down and discovered that his pants leg was also damp, his thoughts turned to the fact that he was bleeding and yet he did not hurt, sniffed his fingers and wondered what blood smelled like, took another sample and tasted it. That's not blood, it's oil, it's hydraulic fluid, looked at the gauges and found both on zero. Now we have a problem - landing gear, flaps and brakes would not operate. Flaps and brakes we can do without, but it would be nice to have a landing gear.

ENGINEERING GETS THE GEAR DOWN

The Co-pilot had not flown much with Grimes but they had been friends since early flight school days; and now were about to work together on a small problem. Both knew that Capt. Lennart (NMI) Wuosmaa, Engineering Officer, had on occasions passed on information to pilots - "On combat flights, don't use the cabin heater, might have a hole and you could be asphyxiated". "If you lose your hydraulics, get the gear down and the safety pin in, any way you can. Three point that bird and the gear will bind and hold." As they approached Saltby at the return altitude of 3,000 feet, it was time to test Al Wuosmaa 5 second suggestion. Grimes cleared the area and went into a power dive, and as he pulled out, the Co-pilot dropped the gear and tried the lock pin. It went in. The rest was routine, fly the pattern, advise the tower, fire a few vary pistol shots and sit light in the seat while waiting for the gear to collapse. Five people aboard 074 held their breath as the tires squeaked and the cockpit was a flurry of hands as throttles, mixture controls, gas selector valves and switches were turned off. Al was right, the gear does hold, and Grimes turned off the runway and rolled to a stop near Base Operations. Mission completed.

Three Lieutenants and two Staff Sergeants walked to the front of 074, fully expecting to see a large hole in the nose of the aircraft. They stood there and found no evidence of damage until someone said, "There it is", and they found one small hole from a rifle bullet. If the German soldier had been a better marksman, he would have missed the altimeter and picked off Glenn Grimes. The Co-pilot thought there was a lot to be said for the right seat as they walked to Squadron Operations.

NOTE:

This document was originally unsigned—but the author is easily identified now as:

David Mondt

The Co-pilot

Dave currently (6/13/02) lives in Boone, Iowa.

TROOP CARRIER

I once had a friend
An old Troop Carrier
Who came at last
To life's final barrier

And when it came time
To get him to heaven
They flew him there
In his very own C-47

Lew Johnston

THE THREE-AIRPLANE INVASION OF FRANCE

Neal Beaver's Story

At the aerodrome at Folkingham, three C-47s of the 29th Troop Carrier Squadron, 313th Troop Carrier Group took off by themselves. They had been delayed by a mechanical problem—but off they went anyway.

The first report of this flight appeared in two consecutive issues of the 29th Troop Carrier Squadron newsletter, but without much about the cast of characters.

Photos: Neal Beaver

Left to right: Capt. Malcom Brannen, Capt. Louis Toth, 1st Lt. Neal Beaver, 1st Lt. Neal Beaver again, Lt. Robert Wheeler—16 September, 1944

My documentation here is based on a personal phone call on April 18, 2001 to fill in the details about Neal Beaver, the person who narrated the paradrop story of the flight in the 29th TCS, 313th TCG airplane on D-Day. He is obviously alive and alert and in full command of his facilities and his memory, which seems exceptionally good. He also has records.

On 6 June 1943, Neal was a First Lieutenant in command of the 81mm Mortar Platoon, 3rd Battalion, Headquarters Company, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. The unit first landed in Ireland by ship, and stayed there while permanent bases were being built in the English Midlands.

Just before the mission, this group of paratroopers was billeted at Wollaton Park, a 100-acre estate in the center of Nottingham, surrounded by a brick wall. There was a large manor house and the estate boasted its own herd of deer. The camp consisted of pyramidal tents with wooden floors, and, a few Nissan Huts for central services. Many of the fields were now farmland.

According to Neal, being stationed around Nottingham was very pleasant. There were friendly young women who took the paratroopers into their hearts. The beer at room temperature was a bit strange to American tastes, but no more so than the mixture of warm beer and orange or lemon drink to create a drink called a "shandy" for women

There were few complaints with the life there, but most of the airborne troops say they were glad to get on with the mission. "You can only do so many practice jumps, you can only clean your weapons so many times, you can only run in formation so much, and you can only dig so many practice foxholes," they said. They wanted to go fight the war for which they were trained.

A CLEAN START

Neal Beaver started his military career as a very young man in the Michigan National Guard in October 1938, and when the Guard was federalized in October of 1940, he shipped with it to Camp Beauregard, Louisiana. As a Staff/Sgt., he was chosen to be interviewed for Officers Candidate School, and was then among 3000 accepted (out of 7000) for airborne training. This took him to Ft. Benning, Georgia for jump school.

By then, the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment was being formed at Camp Blanding—one of five. The "Old Man" in Neal's unit was 27, and his advice was to pick Boy Scouts, Farmers, and Small Town Boys for paratroopers, simply because they would be accustomed to being outdoors. "Very good advice," says Neal, "You gotta suffer as a paratrooper, and these folks are more ingenious and used to it than city folks."

The unit shipped overseas in December 1943, and landed on the Northeast Coast of Northern Ireland overlooking the Irish Straits. They were billeted there temporarily, but soon their permanent camp in Nottingham, England was ready, and they moved there.

Neal tells his story of D-Day in his own way, and certainly very well, but there are a couple of things that the readers might miss. Most of the 313th Troop Carrier Group, and its four Troop Carrier Squadrons departed from Folkingham Aerodrome—long before the three C-47s described here got into the air. And these aircraft made it only after the flight leader had to change airplanes. They flew the mission by themselves, without seeing any of the original formation.

NEAL BEAVER'S JUMP

This first appeared in Editions M-27 and M-28 of *Papoose Express News*, the newsletter of the 29th Troop Carrier Association of the 313th Troop Carrier Group. It was first addressed to Joe Harkiewicz, the historian of the 29th Troop Carrier Squadron at the request of Robert Nelson, leader of the 29th flight carrying 3rd Battalion, 81mm Mortar Platoon into Normandy June 5/6 1944. The narrator is Neal Beaver.

June, 1993

Quickly to business. I have identified the aircraft and crew that carried my Platoon Sgt. on D-Day. This was Joe Anderson of Columbia Falls Montana. Joe was a great leader, he got a battlefield commission during Normandy, and he survived the war. He flew in with 1st Lt Robert Kerr, so I picked up Kerr's address from the 29th TCS newsletter and sent addresses to both.

My 3rd plane then carried my Senior Section Sgt. Zelinski. Unfortunately. "Zeke" was killed in Normandy. He was my platoon Sgt. at the time since Joe Anderson had been transferred over to command the 2nd Battalion 81mm mortar platoon. One of war's Ironies: I got Joe a commission and lost him to another unit at once. Zeke's flight crew may be interested in knowing that he was one hell of a fighting man. His death was doubly tragic in that a short round from our own artillery killed him—after we had been relieved and were returning to Nottingham. (July 5 or 6)

Our (508th) 3rd Battalion came to Folkingham by truck and English buses from our base in Wollaton Park, Nottingham. Our 1st Battalion was at Folkingham also. Our Headquarters Unit and 2nd Battalion were at Saltby.

As I recall, we were there (all on cots in one massive hangar) for five or six days before D-Day. We had our own kitchens set up somewhere and ate very well—especially since we were receiving free PX rations once or twice per day. Fattening the calf, so to speak. Our time was spent lounging, studying the maps and aerial photos, gambling, reading, etc. It was a pleasant relief after our intensive training believe me. We did pack our bundles and have them all mounted on the C-47s as soon as all aircraft were assigned a chalk number (a temporary staging number on the side).

Other than the combined briefing by our Col. Mendez and the Troop Carrier Commanding Officer, I don't remember any other contact with the air crews, other than for the three crew chiefs: Sgt. Robert Lachmund, S/Sgt. Manuel, and Sgt. Robert Rienstock—all of whom supervised the loading of our bundles.

We were so loaded up with ammo, guns, mines, demolition packs, rations, etc. we must have weighed 300 pounds each. How those fantastic C-47s got off the ground that night is still a mystery to me. As I recall, it was a worry to the aircrew also because I can remember much fussing and discussing over that center of gravity calculator that night. Since we were all young and ignorant, I assume your guys finally Just said: *The hell with it; it will probably fly!* I do recall that our angle of ascent was so flat that it is fortunate that the tall TV antennas were in the future.

ALMOST LEFT BEHIND

When the port engine of Nelson's plane wouldn't start we were in a panic. The worst feeling of being left behind I've ever experienced. We fell out of that plane like bloated frogs—pulled the bundle trip and waddled across the runway between trios of aircraft roaring by. One bundle chute burst open, and contrary to one report, we left it behind. (81mm Mortar ammunition).

When we were loading the spare plane we heard Lachmund having a rather violent "discussion" with the crew of the spare about who was going to Normandy. Nelson must have been the senior officer because he ended the discussion and boarded the plane. Airborne over England, and all the way to our drop, I stood in the door with another of our battalion officers Bill Gary (killed in action In Holland) and with Sgt. Lachmund—so Lachmund saw everything I saw.

We were alone—3 planes—I never saw another aircraft. I recall critiquing Nelson mentally as follows: "Well, he is OK, he saw the blinking light on the submarine, he made the left turn, we're doing fine, etc. etc." We saw the ChanneI Islands clearly and made landfall well south of our intended route. We were at 1500/1800 feet and I could see that the left plane was holding tight and of course found out the same was true of the plane on our right. We had very few cloud problems, if any, just some isolated ground haze.

I could see the silver ribbons of the Merderet and the Douve rivers and could even see the large volume of fire rising from the flak train we had been told was parked at St. Sauvzeur le-Vicomte far to the north. I recall telling Lachmund to tell Nelson to turn left. I had been drilled in the land features; I could see the whole area just as the sand table had it. I don't know if the message got through or not because we started to take some machine gun fire and suddenly we were down to 600/700 feet and popped out over the opposite beach. In fact, I compute now that we were exactly between the targeted UTAH and OMAHA landing beaches.

TURNING THE RIGHT WAY

Clear sky–bright moonlight—the beach was a beautiful white strip, and the water had some white caps. It was quiet and calm compared to the ride across the peninsula. Nelson snapped that C-47 into a tight and wide open left turn. I recall thinking: *he is turning the right way*. As soon as the direction stabilized on west, we came under machine gun fire. The first burst looked like it was coming straight for my forehead, but it swept by in a gentle curve to the east.

The next burst caught us front to rear. The plane took a sudden lurch, lost some more altitude, and roared back up to speed. Nelson had evidently set up for the **GO** light as soon as he completed the turn. I found out later that he and some others of the crew had been wounded. This first burst nicked Bill Gary across the nose, and I caught a 9mm round in the jaw. It knocked me back, but I bounced back into the door and as the green light snapped on, I kept right on going out of the plane.

As it turned out, the full bore Jump saved us because our chutes snapped open with such speed. I know I oscillated just once or twice and hit the ground hard.

Your guys did a great job, considering the circumstances. Three planes, alone, out over the opposite shore and then directly into a flurry of flak and fire, yet the three planes stayed so tight. I had my entire platoon of 50+ troopers all together by 6:00 that morning. (I hit the ground at 1:30AM).

As it turns out, the low altitude was a break also, not one man was fired at in the air. I had to leave seven men behind in a French home when I left at 8:00AM. All had jump injuries: broken arms, two broken ankles, a wrenched back, etc. By D+ 3 or 4, all were on medical ships headed for

England. We left one broken mortar but found every single bundle. That's one hell of a tight jump, even by Fort Bragg training standards

I found my regiment on D+3 without losing another man. The medics dug the machine gun round out of my chin at that time, and I still have it. Evidently it was a tracer with the phosphorus used up and therefore light enough to just slide under my skin.

RIGHT ON THE BUTTON

You should know, and it is important to me that you do, that my company commander, Captain Malcom Brannen was dropped exactly where he was supposed to be—in the middle of our drop zone just 1/4 of a mile from the German Beach commander's Headquarters. So, when this German general started for the beach (UTAH) at 7 or 8:00AM, his VW (later called *The Thing* in America) ran into Malcom's ambush, and thus ended General Falley's life.

My 3rd Battalion mortar platoon lost its 1st man by enemy fire on June 18th, but from then on it got worse. We lost eight wounded In action and three killed In action on June 20th alone. Our regiment (508th) fought constantly for 33 days as shock troops for the regular infantry until July 3rd and 4th when we were so decimated we couldn't function as a unit. It is interesting to note here that the 4th Division on UTAH Beach, which had airborne activities between them and any German reinforcements, sustained only 200 casualties. While OMAHA Beach that had no airborne support, sustained 3,000. About 2,000 of these are estimated to have been *Killed In Action.*

THE 29th TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON HISTORIAN REPORTS ON THE SAME FLIGHT

Joseph Harkewiecz (Col. USAF Ret.) documented this incident in his book: WE ARE THE 29TH Troop Carrier squadron

The 29th Troop Carrier Squadron was briefed and instructed very much the same as all others that day. They were to drop American paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division on the Cotentin Peninsula of France to prevent the German inland divisions from responding to the invasion, and to keep the approaches open for our assault forces from UTAH Beach to the interior. But this report starts with the end of a three-day pass in Leeds. The narrator is Sgt Robert Lachmund, the crew chief on the plane that dropped Neal Beaver and his paratroops.

[LACHMUND] “There was a tapping on the bedroom door and I realized that my three-day pass was for all intents and purposes, over. I was in Leeds where many of the members of the 29th spent their passes. It was about 6:00AM June 5, and I had to get the train to Grantham.

“It was about a four hour ride to Grantham, and when we arrived we found that the trucks that usually met us were not to be found. Not only that, but we could not find any other 29th men in our usual haunts. After a lot of hassle, I finally got thru by telephone to Captain Cobbe, the Adjutant. He told me that he could not talk on the phone, but that 1 should get out to the base as soon as possible and bring anyone else from the squadron along with me.

“We hopped a cab and got to the main gate where we were refused admittance. The people on guard were members of the 29th and we had known some of them since we got into the squadron in Florence. Captain Cobbe finally came to the gate and got matters straightened out and we were allowed to enter. He updated us on what was happening — namely that today was to be D-Day.

“I changed clothes and headed for the line and talked to my assistant. He assured me that the plane was ready, but neglected to tell me that the radiomen had been working on the radio. I also found out that Bob Nelsen was going to be the pilot because Fitzpatrick, my regular pilot, was going to fly with someone from Group. The rest of the crew was the same.

“Up to this time things had been bad enough, but from here on in they went downhill in a hurry. The paratroopers came out and we attached the parapacks. We loaded up and when the order to start engines was given, ours would not start. We tried hand cranking, but only succeeded in sticking the solenoids. Soon it was obvious that our bird was not going to fly that night. ‘OK Joe, we’ve got to take the standby plane.’ We alerted our paratroopers and they sprang into action and transferred all their gear (including parapacks) to the reserve airplane. It didn’t take fifteen minutes before we had made the transfers and had engines started. Nelson’s wingmen Kerr and Kreiser had waited for him.

The aircraft that flew that day was C-47 #42-32810, chalk number #52. The crew was:

Pilot	1st Lt. Nelsen, Robert (NMI)
Co-Pilot	1st Lt. Denson, Joseph D.
Navigator	2nd Lt. 2nd Lt. Connors, Walter W.
Radio Operator.	SSgt. Aldrich, William F.
Crew chief	Sgt. Lachmund, Robert A.

[BOB NELSEN} “We led our individual flight out to the run-up position. All the other birds had gone south. We took off, got our flight together and headed for Bournemouth on the south coast of England. We didn’t see any of the thousands of airplanes that were in the air that night. We flew southwest over the channel and turned east (Hoboken) and flew between the Channel Islands. What a greeting? Tracers were coming up from both sides. Fortunately, we were out of range of their guns. Soon the coast of France loomed up in front of us. I told Joe that we were going to make our own invasion with just our three-plane flight.

We made landfall where we were supposed to and started looking for signs of the DZ. It wasn’t there. ‘CONNORS, where in hell is it?” It wasn’t to be. I guess the pathfinders ran out of candles. Then all hell broke loose. Tracers were coming at us from all directions. We continued to look for some sign. ‘ALDRICH, can’t you get any radio signal from the Drop Zone?’ That wasn’t to be either. Soon another beach loomed up ahead. ‘Joe, we’ve gone a beach too far. We’ve got to go around.’

I set up a wide turn to the left. I set it up so we would pass over the site where we estimated the DZ to be. Tracers continued to light up the night. It looked ominous. We completed our 360-degree turn and slowed down to drop our stick of paratroopers. Finally the ground fire got us. What a racket! As far as I know our troops all got out per schedule.”

WE WENT AROUND AGAIN

[LACHMUND] We went around again and that is when we were hit. I cannot remember if paratroopers jumped when we were hit or if they had already jumped, but it was close. I grabbed the manual release for the parapacks because the box at the door had been hit and I did not know if they had been released. There was some yelling going on up front and, after I pulled in the static lines, I went toward the cockpit.

The first person I met was Bill Aldrich. The left side of his face looked as though it had been hit by a porcupine. One of the bullets had gone through the navigator’s table and the splinters lodged in his face and some had pierced his eyelid. On getting to the cockpit, I found that Nelsen had taken one through his leg and that Joe Denson was flying the plane from the right seat. The left control column was useless. The shot that wounded Nelsen took the skin off of Denson’s flack jacket. An inch further back and this would not have been written.

“Connors and I got some morphine into Nelsen with Connors doing the honors. I got under Nelsen’s shoulders and tried to lift him out of the seat while Joe flew with one hand and tried to support his leg with the other. We finally got him out of the cockpit and onto a litter. Connors and Aldrich stayed with him while I went back to the cockpit.

[JOE DENSON] “We got shot up pretty bad. Nelsen took a hit in the leg; Aldrich took one in the face. Conners had one in the butt, and Lachmund caught a piece of shrapnel in the hand. All crewmen except me sustained injuries, although flak did penetrate my flak suit. I looked over at Nelsen, he seemed to be nodding. The troops had jumped, and I didn’t know he was hit.”

[NELSEN] “I had been hit but didn’t know it for several minutes. The first indication I had was that my left foot wouldn’t respond. I yelled at Joe to take over and head for the channel. Fortunately we were not able to detect any loss of oil or fuel. We were all excited. I instructed Joe to get to

350-degrees (direct course to South-Hampton) and hightail it for England and the emergency strip. Good old Bob Lachmund had put a tourniquet on my left leg to stop the bleeding and he gave me a morphine shot. I wasn't feeling a bit good. I began to sweat. I never sweated like that in my entire life. I never knew what trauma was before that time. After we settled down on a course to England,

Bob pulled me out of the cockpit and got me stretched out on the bucket seats in the cabin. That's all I remember until we passed over the emergency landing strip and Bob fired the red flare to alert the ground medical crew.

"The medics put me on a stretcher and into an ambulance that took me too a general hospital five miles away. It was about 0430 when at the emergency room they began debriding (wound cleaning) procedures. The doctor asked me where I had been. When I told him that we had dropped paratroopers in France and the invasion was on, he didn't believe me. Nothing was announced until 0600 that same day."

[DENSON] "All the crewmembers of that plane went to the hospital except me. The medics at first sight thought I had also been hit. I was splattered with blood, mostly from Bob Lachmund's hand as he performed cockpit duties. Nelsen's wounds were severe, while those of the other crewmen were considered slight. The British doctors gave me a few swigs of scotch—later a bottle of gin."

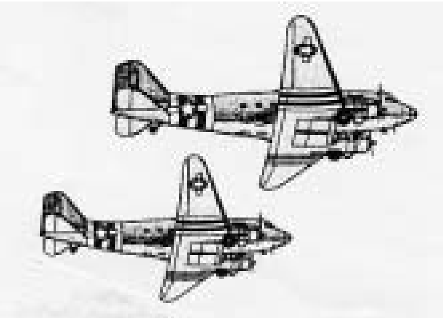
FLASH REPORT

The 313th Troop Carrier Group, leading the 52ndWing, was first to report. "Attempted to follow prescribed route, but was unable to do so because of weather. Weather caused group formation to break up completely, and aircraft then proceeded individually to Drop Zone. Cloud cover 10/10 with base of 900 feet and tops of 8,000 feet and above, which extended to south coast of England. Ceiling then lifted and visibility improved, and at designated DZ there were scattered 5/10 clouds cover with base of 4,000 feet, tops unknown, and visibility 10 to 20 miles. From sandbar to DZ, snipers shot at aircraft. What appeared to be 40mm AA fire encountered from Ste. Mere Eglise and from west. of DZ. Machine gun and small arms fire encountered from all around area of DZ. Concentrated 20mm fire from Carentan."

NEPTUNE ANALYSIS:

We need not have worried about all the Germans knowing of our presence when passing the Channel Islands. Initial sightings of Allied paradrops were not taken seriously by German intelligence. They had been "bitten" hours earlier by such reports, only to find the Allies had dropped many dummy paratroopers. These were three-foot high, rubber inflatable dummies that discharged firecrackers when landed. This was part of an elaborate deception plan, code name "FORTITUDE," designed to keep the enemy guessing the where and when of the invasion.

German divisions were kept in readiness in Norway since there was evidence that tank units were staging in Scotland. A couple of inflatable tanks sloppily camouflaged, and a jeep pulling a heavy roller with tank treads, convinced our enemy's photo intelligence of the build-up.



THE ONE MAN RADIO SHOW

Arthur Een's D-Day Communications Report

After we were settled in England, most of our radio operators (including me) went back to school. We went in groups of two or three, and the object was catch up on some of the later developments in radar; and also to get acquainted with the amazing radio aids then available to flight crews over the United Kingdom.

My friend Sgt. A. W. Hastings was sent to Pathfinder school, which practically assured him of being one of the spearheads of the coming invasion. The selectors could not have made a wiser choice. It is sad to recall that this very polite and unassuming young man was killed as a passenger in a B-24 on his way home after the war.

THE BRIEFING

Suddenly we knew. On the 4th of June we were briefed for the paradrop; the day had finally arrived. I do not suppose it was any great secret to anyone, and it must have been the most highly publicized event in the annals of war. The Germans knew it was coming, and they also knew just about when it had to be launched since weather conditions for a channel invasion were only favorable for a short period.

But they could only guess at where we would land. So when the briefing officer uncovered the map, he reminded us that the Nazi high command would give millions of dollars for a good look at it. So "mum's the word," he said.

We were scheduled to take off at eleven o'clock that night, but the weather was so bad that the invasion was postponed for twenty-four hours. So it was the following day, after the meteorologist presented all the facts to General Eisenhower, that he gave the go-ahead.

Perhaps because the Normandy D-Day was so highly publicized, just being part of it was thrilling in itself. Before the end of the war, we were to take part in airdrops with still greater numbers of men and planes. And certainly, our own squadron losses had been much heavier on the second airdrop during the Sicilian invasion. But at this date, more than thirty years later, historians rehash the *Grandfather of all "D-Days."*

THE BOYHOOD DREAM

I strongly suspect there is a touch of the heroic fantasy in all men. Long before D-Day, and while I was still a civilian, I had dreams of being part of the avenging force that would put an end to the German march toward world domination. Now that the time had arrived I sat in my crew position aboard a plane, just as I had envisioned it so many years before.

However, by this time it was a bit different; I no longer felt like a super patriot. In the dark of a low overcast night, with scores of engines revving up, and a plane loaded with grim looking paratroopers, the sensation was more one of apprehension, if not downright fear. These missions did not always go "just like in the movies." Even the dry runs invariably resulted in some casualties. At this time of the war, all that mattered was getting it over with—and then my own speedy demobilization.

USAAF Photo

Part of the crew in the report, *The One Man Radio Show:* L to R T/Sgt. Henry Jeffries, Captain Eugene Turkelson, and S/Sgt. Arthur Een.

In spite of all this, there was the feeling that this was one of the mightiest events in the annals of man. We were familiar enough with the ways of the news media to realize that in a matter of a few hours, the radio waves and newspapers all over the world would be blasting away with sensational banner headlines, which were never equaled

And now as I write this 25years later, I still feel a strong sense of pride. When another veteran asks if I was by chance part of the invasion of Normandy, I am pleased to say that I was, and offer my hand to a “soul brother”. We may have been on God’s side, as Joe Louis said when he volunteered for military service; but for this invasion and the previous one I had been on in Sicily, I never forgot that we had to help ourselves too.

The Germans wore “Got mitt uns” (God’s With Us) lettering and I always wondered how Celestial Decisions were finally made. The Germans on one hand were battling for dear life against the so-called atheistic Reds; but on the other hand they were doing their best to exterminate the chosen people. At the time of this writing, Grambling University in Louisiana was turning out many players who became pro stars. Their coach, Eddie Robinson, once came upon the team praying for victory. He told them that God did not care who won those football games, and to get out there and hit somebody. And that seems to have been the Russian philosophy as well.

BOMBER CREWS, TOO

All military personnel in England had not just been training and waiting for many months for the invasion of Normandy. The bomber crews of the American and British air forces had been hitting the Axis targets with steadily increasing bomb loads; and were escorted as far as range would permit by fighter squadrons. Many of us, including me, hoped that they alone could bring the German military machine down in defeat.

This was too much to expect, but now that the invasion was scheduled, the Allies had such complete mastery of the skies that our transport crews assumed than any planes over the invasion course would be ours. Fortunately, it worked out this way.

Our course took us southward to a point slightly west of the Channel Islands—Jersey and Guernsey. Then we made a ninety-degree turn to the left; the desired objective being to pass equidistant between these two islands. At the radio briefing we were told that if this navigational feat were accomplished our flights should be out of the range of the German flak guns based there.

There were eighteen planes from our squadron. We formed two V of Vs of nine airplanes following each other 1000 ft. back. Other groups in front and back of us, flew in similar patterns.

NINE PLANES WIDE—FIVE HOURS LONG

To visualize the enormity of this operation, besides being nine planes wide, it was strung out for something like five hours. The groups had to be coordinated from dozens of bases in England so that they would mesh into a solid train. The naval armada was even more awesome. Following the launching of the second front, Joseph Stalin was quoted as saying that never in military history had the world witnessed anything as grandiose or spectacular.

The lead plane of each nine was equipped with a “Rebecca” interrogator unit, which activated a “Eureka” response unit set up on the drop zone. I was the radio operator in the lead plane of the first group. The pilot of our plane was Captain Edwin H. Greer. Our co-pilot was a Lt. Charles E. Johnson who later was to die in a crash near Liege, Belgium. I do not recall who our navigator was. Sgt. Henry Jeffries was the Crew Chief (or Aerial Engineer, as he preferred).

Visibility at times was zero-zero, and other times it opened up a little. Captain Greer tried lower altitudes and then higher ones in an effort to find better visibility. As we approached the Cherbourg peninsula we were at fifteen hundred feet but had to let down to around seven hundred feet to drop our paratroopers and loads. We came out of the overcast just before reaching that lower altitude at about 0200. We were scheduled to be over St. Mere Eglise at six minutes past the hour.

Since our run over land was to take twelve minutes, we expected a fair amount of flak and small arms fire, and it was certainly there. The first planes had dropped their troopers ahead of us, and the hornet’s nest had been nicely stirred up by that time. The sound of a flak burst hitting a plane can best be described as sounding like a hailstorm on a tin roof.

Before take-off time, one of our paratroopers asked me if I would stand back by the cargo door and give him a good solid push if he froze before jumping. A refusal to jump could result in a pretty stiff sentence. This didn’t feel OK, so I didn’t do it—and I don’t know to this day what he might have had in mind.

In a matter of minutes, our pilots spotted the lighted panel with the proper color designation for our drop. The red light, or warning light, in the plane cabin had been on now for several minutes, and then the green light was switched on to signal the paratroopers to jump. The planes had throttled back to slower speeds for minimal shock to the troopers as their chutes opened. And as usual, the landing gear warning horns were blaring away inside the planes. This provided some assurance of proper speed and altitude.

A WARNING SIGN

This was a warning indication designed for quite another purpose—to prevent wheels-up landings, but in a paradrop situation, it provided some assurance of proper speed and altitude. It was triggered automatically when the aircraft was below 1000 feet and the engine speed was below 1000 rpm, and the landing gear was still retracted.

Many paratroopers told me later that they felt sorry for us since we could not get away from the flak, but had to fly back through it. I certainly appreciate hearing that kind of sympathy from the men I consider the cream of the fighting crop.

Wherever you are at this writing, I salute you all—the men of the 82nd and 101st Division, and the Allied Airborne Army.

After our stick of paratroopers had cleared the door, Captain Greer went into a rapid climb to get away from the flak, which was concentrated at the lower levels. At six thousand feet he leveled off and we soon were over the Channel on our way back to England.

NO REST FOR THE ANXIOUS

I refused to relax however, and thought up all sorts of possibilities like damaged gas tanks, wing bolts, hydraulic lines, and perhaps tires punctured by flak bursts. In those higher latitudes during the month of June, daylight comes quite early. When we touched down neatly back in the Midlands around five o’clock, the night had ended.

A check of our aircraft by the ground crews found most of them still ready for flight. A supply drop was scheduled for the early morning hours of June 7th, and since our plane was among those selected, the heat was on again.

For the supply drop, the undersides of the planes were loaded with parapacks containing high priority supplies. These parapacks were also used when paratroopers were riding in the cabin, and were released by a salvo control switch in the pilots’ compartment. Inside the plane, the cabin was filled with several heavy boxes, which were rigged to parachutes attached to static lines.

Photo Neal Beaver

Downed C-47 in the Merderet or the Douve

Our route was the same as for the night drop, which spearheaded the invasion. This was the first occasion when we had ever made a daylight mission over enemy territory. Visibility was quite good and we were greeted with the usual amount of flak and small arms fire. I could not say it was any more comforting to be able to see the crews who were putting up the flak.

When it was time to push out our boxes the co-pilot came back to lend a hand as we had some very heavy ones. When all were finally jettisoned, we yelled to Captain Greer to kick the plane in the ass and get the hell out of there. This time instead of climbing for a safer altitude he dove the plane right to the tree top level and we hedgehopped to the coast. This was an effective way to escape flak, which could not be fired effectively at low altitudes in the dark. We stayed low for most of the return and climbed to several thousand feet shortly before reaching the English coast.

Over the channel, we spotted several planes, which had ditched. The crews appeared to be all right and we waved to them and noticed that launches of the British Air Sea Rescue were racing to the scene. On each occasion when we approached the English coast, I was reminded of a bunch of little chicks scampering back to the mother hen after straying a little too far away and being frightened by some unknown terror in the barnyard.

Our landing again went off without trouble, and the crews mingled on the ramp swapping the usual after mission reports. One pilot remarked that a greased straight pin could not have been driven up his butt with a sledgehammer. That was pretty hard to top for holding a tight rear end. I thought complexions were pretty much gray for several hours, until most of the shock wore off.

After these combat missions, and after a calming jolt of Old Overholt rye whiskey, the crews went through an interrogation session before going to the mess halls. The usual questions concerned the amount of flak, whether the drop was on target, were any enemy aircraft spotted etc. I often wondered what was considered *light* flak. If I saw one burst or tracer bullet as far away as the horizon I rated the flak as heavy.

TWO PLANES MISSING IN TWO DAYS

We had one plane missing from this first mission, but we soon learned that it had landed at one of the first coastal airfields in England. The pilot was 1st Lt. Richard Randolph, the co-pilot, according to one record was 2nd Lt. Fern W. Pett. Randolph remembers his co-pilot as 2nd Lt. Charles E. Johnson. He doesn't remember the navigator, and there are conflicting reports about the crew chief and radio operator. The course was planned to fly west of London to avoid the trigger-happy anti-aircraft gun crews in that city. They would fire at any overhead planes, and ask questions later.

Randolph tells it like this:

> "We were caught in a search light from about the door back, and we were under heavy fire from both sides. This was after letting down through the overcast to about 500 feet. The oil line on the right engine was severed and I feathered the prop. The left engine was also acting up, and the rudder cable was severed. The navigator had a sliver of wood from his desk pinning the lids of one eye together.
>
> I dropped on target and got out of there. We nursed the plane back across the channel to a single strip airfield just over the coast called Tarrant Rushton. I landed straight in, and while we were there contacting our base, the crew counted holes in the airplane. There were 326, some as close as 6 inches from the gas tanks. Part of the trailing edge of the left wing was turned up in a 90-degree angle. Someone flew down to get us, but I don't remember being debriefed."

The airplane was repaired, and may have been the one we called *Patches.* Randolph cannot verify this at this late date.

ONCE A SECRET REPORT

But not today. The jumpmaster called the shots.

:::
: AUTH: CO 3l4th TC GP :
: DATE: 14 June 1944 :
: INIT:________________ :
:::

This is the official narrative statement of the crew of A/C #42-93002, 62nd Troop Carrier Squadron, 314th Troop Carrier Group, in connection with events of BIGOT-NEPTUNE #1

The crew of this aircraft consisted of:

Capt Charles S. Cartwright, 0-731943, Pilot
F/0 Alma M. Magleby, T-926, Co-pilot
2nd Lt Edward I. Osborne, 0-805327, Navigator
S/Sgt Raymond H. Farris, 151147O3, Crew Chief
S/Sgt Frank A. DeLuca, 3245328, Radio Operator

"We flew number seven position in our first serial on this mission, leading the third element of the first squadron. We reached the Drop Zone in formation and have nothing to add to the mission report up to that time. Approaching the DZ, our airspeed was between 105 and 110 mph, our indicated altitude was 700 feet—the same as the leading element in our formation.

In seeing the stick leave the lead ship, we gave the green light, but our stick did not jump. The jumpmaster, Capt Simmons, instructed the crew chief to tell the pilot that the plane was too low, and that he would not jump his men at that height. The intercom was damaged, and the crew chief could not reach the pilot, so he passed the message to the navigator, who relayed it to the pilot. As soon as the message was received, we went up to 800 feet indicated, made a right turn, and began a second pass at the DZ. At this time the jumpmaster had come up to the cockpit to confer with the pilot, who said to him *Get the hell Out: every one except your stick has jumped!*

HIT ON THE SECOND PASS

During this second pass, we were hit by explosive flak—probably 40mm—two rounds of which went through the plane. One round narrowly missed Crew Chief Farris, who was at that time in the door of the companionway, and the other went through the rear of the fuselage. Paratrooper No 17 in the stick was hit by fragments of this flak, which detonated two of the hand grenades in his pouch, seriously injuring him. We went over the DZ again, and once again the troops did not jump, although they received the signal.

DOWN ON THE THIRD

We turned for a third pass, and this time the navigator told the jumpmaster that there was going to be a forced landing. The stick went out at once, a short distance south of the DZ, going in a westerly direction at 750 feet at 110-115 mph. The injured paratrooper, No 17, did not jump.

Immediately after the jump, both engines quit, either at once or so close together that it made no difference, The pilot turned the plane 180 degrees to the right hoping to reach the ocean. He saw that he would be unable to do so, and made a further 90 degree turn to the right (putting the aircraft on a southwesterly heading) hoping to reach the flooded area to the south of the DZ.

The altitude was not sufficient to reach this area, so the crew took crash positions in the plane and it was set down in an open field. On gong in, it clipped a row of trees bordering the field. Both engines were on fire, but Capt. Cartwright made a relatively smooth belly-landing. The plane came to rest in the middle of the field, and the crew evacuated it with all speed. The wounded paratrooper got out by himself. The pilot, the crew chief, and the radio operator carried the paratrooper, who had collapsed close to the plane, further away, and them the pilot went back into the plane for a first-aid kit and supplies. He recovered a kit, but was unable to reach anything else. Upon return to the paratrooper, the pilot found that he had his own morphine, and was asking to have it administered; the co-pilot and navigator did this.

We then began to carry the paratrooper toward the hedge bordering the field, which offered the only nearby cover—and as we got a short distance away, the aircraft exploded. The paratrooper, now unconscious, was concealed in the hedge, and about 2:45AM, we began traveling south in a zig zag line, looking for a place to hide out. About 3/4 mile from the plane, we found a dry ditch cowered with brambles, and this became the hideout for all of us.

We cannot positively locate the position of the crashed plane, but believe it was over a mile east of DZ "N." It was not in the flooded area, and we did not cross any large streams on our way to the coast, so we believe the crash was east of the Merderet River, probably in the vicinity of the village of Coquerie.

About an hour after we had hidden, we heard a voice say "Sprechen Sie Deutsch" in an American accent, which was followed by the sign. We gave the correct countersign, and two US paratroopers—one with a badly injured ankle on which he could hardly walk—joined us. At dawn the uninjured paratrooper left to find his outfit. The whole crew, with the injured paratrooper, stayed where it was until 2:00PM on Tuesday 6 June l944. During these hours, we could hear a variety of firing of all types in all directions. We identified machine guns, rif1es, hand grenades, 88s and other large German guns, and naval bombardment in the direction of the coast.

BACK TO THE AIRCRAFT

At 2:00PM, we turned cautiously back toward the plane. We stopped two fields away from it, and the co-pilot and crew chief were left in hiding, while the pilot, navigator, and the radio operator went ahead using a stone wall bordering the field as partial cover. The navigator finally reached the aircraft, but except for its tall assembly it was entirely destroyed, and we could find no food, water, or other supplies. In the meantime the pilot went to the place where paratrooper #17 had been left the night before. He found that a flak suit and a Mae West had been carefully concealed in the bushes during the crew's absence, but the trooper had disappeared. We assumed that he had been picked up, either by French civilians or by our own men—so the three other crew members rejoined the co-pilot and crew chief two fields away from the aircraft.

After a discussion, we agreed on a scouting trip. The navigator went off to the northeast, and the pilot went southwest. This was at 3:45PM, and we agreed to meet gain in the same place at or before 5:45PM. The pilot approached a large stone farmhouse, which stood some distance on the other side of the plane, and observed several French farmers, including children, who went out to look at the wreck. He decided not to communicate with them, and he returned to the hiding place. The navigator had already returned.

The navigator reported a highway about a ten-minute walk to the east, running generally north and south. He also reported that the sound of heavy guns was quite near the highway to the south, although he did not observe any emplacements. He was afraid to cross this road, feeling sure that it was well posted by the enemy, so returned to the hideout.

The crew remained in the new hideout until about 8:00PM, when they heard American voices in the next field. The navigator went toward the sound, and a few moments later, he turned and called for the crew. When the rest of us crossed to him, he told us that he had met an old school mate in that outfit, and that he had arranged for transportation to the beach. We began running across the field toward our troops, the navigator in the lead, when someone on our left front began shooting at us with rifles. We hit the dirt, and shouted the password. The shooting stopped, the navigator got up to continue his course, but the firing broke out again and the navigator was hit. He fell to the ground. A soldier from the 4th Division came toward us, and yelled at the rest to stop firing.

A first-aid crew came over, examined the navigator, and discovered him to have been lit in the fleshy part of the buttocks. There was no exit wound, so we did not know if any bones were struck—but we didn't think so, and did not believe the wound was very serious.

We were then taken to a major and three lieutenants, leaving the navigator to be removed by stretcher. These officers apologized for incautious firing by their men. We got into a jeep with the major and headed for the beach, about 2-1/2 miles away, traveling along the road running from the town of Ste Mere Eglise (coordinates35.2-97.), 40.7-03.5 Map reference sheet 6E/3 and 6 E/5, France 1:50,000, 3rd edition). The major turned off to the left, gave us directions for walking to the beach, and left us. Along this road, our men engaged in digging out snipers, and enemy observation posts, and French civilians were helping by giving directions, warning of mines, and offering other aid. Tanks are coming up along the road from the shore, and our forces from the beach were already in touch with the paratroop and glider forces that had landed farther inland. It was approximately 2030 hours on Tuesday 6 June 1944 when the major left us.

FINALLY TO THE BEACH

When we arrived on the beach, we had trouble making contact with anyone in authority who could help us, but finally found a US Navy Commander who was in charge of the sector. He put us on a boat and we left the beach about 11:00PM. We reported to the CO of an LCVP lying off shore, and after the crew spent some time getting the ship off a shoal, we traveled in it about 12 miles to the US "Bayfield," a headquarters and hospital ship. We arrived there about 2:30AM Wednesday, 7 June 1944.

At 7:30AM, we got up, having been fed and put to bed in the sick bay of the "Bayfield" as soon as we arrived. About 8:00 - 8:30AM, a colonel arrived with a rescued P-47 pilot, and we followed him to the USS "Ancon", another headquarters ship. (This craft was the headquarters for all that section of the beach, and many generals and admirals were present upon it, including General De-Gaulle, who was observing the action and broadcasting messages to the French. From this ship, we transferred via another LCVP to LST 75, arriving about 2:00PM on Wednesday afternoon. This ship began to unload that night and finished the following morning. At about 9:00PM Thursday 8 June 1944, we left for the UK in a convoy of 40 - 50 ships.

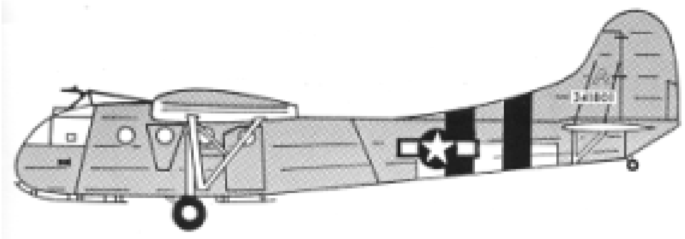
'We arrived off Portland about 2:00PM Friday, and stayed on board until Saturday morning 10 June 1944. We then went through two straggler—survivor camps, the second at Weymouth. At the latter, we arrived simultaneously with 206 US glider pilots, who had just been brought back from the continent. From here we went to Southampton in trucks1 where we arrived about 6:00PM. The pilot immediately telephoned our base and spoke to Lt Col Myer, who sent Major Falkner and Capt Roush to pick us up at Stonycross Airfield near Southampton about 8:30PM on Saturday 10 June 1944. We arrived at our base about 10:30PM the same evening.

While we were on the continent, we did not observe any engagements with the enemy, although we heard much firing. We saw some empty gliders in the vicinity of Ste Mere Eglise, but we did not see the town itself. We did not see any of our glider troops.

We found that our troops had been instructed to shoot at anyone moving around at night, whereas we had been advised to hide during the day and do our traveling at night if we landed in enemy territory. Instructions on such matters should be coordinated, in order to prevent avoidable injury from our own troops."

HARRISON LOESCH
Captain, Air Corps
Intelligence Officer

WACO CG-4A Combat Glider



CG- 4A from photo after Market Garden

If you go to The U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, you will see one of the 13,909 CG-4A gliders built in the USA during WW II. There are other restorations. For details and locations, refer to the box at the bottom of this page.

A few facts about the CG-4A

Wingspan	83 ft.- 8 in.
Length	48 ft. - 3.75 in.
Height	12 ft.- 7.44 in.
Empty weight	3750 lbs.
Gross weight	7500–9000 lbs.
Tow speed	150 mph.
Stall speed	41–55 mph.
Average glide speed	65 mph.
Glide ratio @ 7500 lbs.	10 to 1
Most common tow plane	C-47 (DC-3)

Cargos often carried

13 troops and 2 pilots.
Jeep and 4 troops and 2 pilots.
Trailer and 7 troops and 2 pilots.
75mm howitzer, 3 troops, 2 pilots, 18 rounds of ammunition.
Anti-tank gun, 3 troops, 2 pilots, ammunition.
3 mules and 3 troops, 2 pilots
2 pilots, misc. cargo: fuel, ammo, rations, medical, mail, evacuate wounded

CG-4As saw action in Sicily, Burma, Normandy, Southern France, Holland, Bastogne, Rhine, New Guinea, and Luzon.

At almost any gathering of *Warbirds*, you will find WW II Glider Pilots. Ask around. Many wear their nametags and wings. Some 6000 were trained in World War II.

NOTE

For more information about the CG-4A glider program, contact The World War II Glider Pilots Association, 136 W Main St., Freehold, NJ, 07728. (732) 462-1838

Revised /Printed August 11, 2001

NO ENGINE, NO PROPELLER, NO ROAR

It's A Combat Glider

Any account of the airborne operations on D-Day would not be complete without including the gliders, the glider pilots, and the glider troops. The whole concept of powerless envelopment, other than in a parachute, was unique to many. The courage and skills of those who served in this way are still to be admired.

Two types of gliders were used in the Normandy invasion—the British Horsa, and the American WACO CG-4A. WACO, incidentally, stands for Weaver Aircraft Company, a long-term manufacturer of beautiful biplanes. The company is in Troy Ohio, but CG-4As were also manufactured in other plants around the country. Manufacturers of pianos and furniture suddenly found themselves making gliders.

"There were four glider missions flown on D-Day—and considering all the usual snarls, these missions went generally well. Two landed just before dawn, one just before dark, and the majority of the fourth mission just after dark. The ground troops welcomed the heavy weapons the gliders carried, but USAF historians concluded some years later that the greatest value lay in the experience they provided in little-known fields of aerial reinforcement and resupply." (Warren-97, 61, 64).

The two missions flown before and after sunset on D-Day included both CG-4As and Horsas. They had extensive fighter escort, and with the advantage of some daylight, they were generally more accurate. These missions were made up of serials from the 434th, 435th, 436th, 437th, and 438th Groups.

The heavy losses projected by most planners for the daylight glider missions just didn't happen—although in one case, the 82nd Airborne commander tried and failed to change the landing zone when he saw that Germans still held it. As in most airborne missions throughout the war, there was no workable way for the airborne forces on the ground to talk to the Troop Carrier Command Post—or for either of them to talk to the Troop Carrier serials in the air. This was before the age of two way pocket radios, and communications failed regularly. As a result, most gliders in this case came down in the original landing zone, with a large loss of men and materiel.

THE SECOND MISSION

On the second mission, in the dark, the 82nd Airborne visual aids on the alternate landing zone (Landing Zone E) were the ones that stood out above the others. This inadvertently led the formation over heavier German anti-aircraft positions, and three C-47s were lost. The darkness and other factors resulted in over 20 per-cent casualties among the Glider Pilots. The four D-Day glider missions consisted of 313 gliders (141 Wacos, and 172 Horsas). They carried 75 artillery pieces (including howitzers and anti-tank guns), 215 vehicles, 1,792 troops, and 174 tons of cargo—much of which was ammunition.

On 7 June 1944 the IX Troop Carrier Command launched two glider missions and two parachute resupply missions. All took off in the early morning hours. The British flew only one large resupply drop during NEPTUNE, which they made near midnight on D-Day. This mission, flown by 50 Dakotas of 46 Group, brought back chilling remembrances of Sicily, when over-anxious U. S. Navy gunners opened up on American troop carrier aircraft in the darkness. The British formation approaching Normandy had six airplanes shot down by “friendly fire.” The first American supply mission received "friendly" fire as well, but with no losses. This mission, to the 82nd Airborne, comprised 208 aircraft drawn from the 61st, 313th, 314th, and 316th Troop Carrier Groups, and was plagued by unpredicted bad weather that forced 25 percent of the planes to turn back. Lack of workable communications again resulted in costly losses of men and supplies. Ten aircraft were lost to small arms fire, and of 1234 tons of cargo, 156 tons were dropped, and only140 were retrieved.

This showed again the danger from concentrated small arms fire to slow flying aircraft at low altitude, and once more, poor communications played its costly role. And according to official air force records, the second mission was never requested by the 101st, and should never have been sent. At least one ground unit, the 501st PIR (Parachute Infantry Regiment) had put out panels with a supply request for reconnaissance spotters, but the only Eureka-Rebecca in operation was in the 82nd area, for the first mission**.**

GERMANS IN THE LANDING ZONES

Some cargo was dropped in Drop Zones, which were still partly occupied by the Germans, and some into areas held by the 82nd, and possibly the 8th Infantry Division. The 442nd TCG, flying 56 aircraft, had over 20 aircraft damaged, and two men wounded. The 440th TCG, with 62 aircraft, had four men killed and two wounded when they lost two planes to flak and from bomb loss when a P-47 flying escort over the Channel inadvertently dropped its bomb cluster on a C-47 flying below it.

Besides the obvious deficiencies in communications between ground and air—which would persist throughout almost the entire war—some telling conclusions were drawn regarding use of gliders in air assaults. According to USAAF historical analysis, the missions on D-Day+l demonstrated that during daylight, infantry units could be delivered by glider within artillery range of an enemy and have 90 percent of their men assembled and ready for action within a couple of hours (Warren-97, 72).

Glider missions—one of the most controversial subjects within the Normandy operational planning staff—had once again proven to be troublesome and excessively dangerous. After Normandy, night landings were not attempted again in the European theater (Warren-97, 9; Dank, a, 128).

We will never again see the likes of the CG-4A, made of plywood, welded steel tubing, and fabric covering. There were over 13,000 made, and like the parachutes, many were just left where they landed for the locals to pick apart. And in some cases, the packing crates were more popular among the glider troops than the glider. They were made of beautiful pine lumber, and were often outfitted as living quarters. And in many cases, they were the only source of lumber for other needs around the various Troop Carrier bases.

Photo: First Troop Carrier Command

A GLIDER PILOT’S STORY

By Flight Officer George E. "Pete" Buckley
74th Troop Carrier Squadron, 434th TCG

On the third of June at Aldermaston, home of the 434th Troop Carrier Group, and a high level of nervous excitement and tension was in the air. Airborne troops in great numbers were moving onto the field with much more equipment than could be used in a training flight. Military police were stationed at all the gates, and no one could get on or off the base.

In the afternoon of June 4th, all C-47 and glider pilots reported to the operations room for a briefing by the group intelligence officer. We all took our seats facing a small stage, and when we had all settled down, he unveiled a map of France. Which showed exactly what and where our objective was. A low gasp and murmur went up, as we all realized that the time had finally come for us to put our skills as glider pilots and tow pilots to the real test. He also told us that, within the last 24 hours, the Germans had been studding the fields in the LZ area with poles, and were digging large ditches across other fields to prevent glider landings. Evidently, the Germans were preparing a lively reception for us.

THE LEAD GLIDER GROUP

His next announcement took us all by surprise. We, the 434th Group, had been chosen to lead the glider phase of the D-Day invasion—with fifty-two CG-4A gliders carrying men and equipment of the 101st Airborne Division. The code name for this serial would be "CHICAGO," and we would land on Landing Zone-E (LZ-E) at Heisville on the Cotentin Peninsula.

Five minutes behind us, taking off from Ramsbury, would be the 437th Group towing fifty-two CG-4As, carrying men of the 82nd Airborne Division. They would land five miles northwest of us in Landing Zone area E (LZ-E) near les Forges. The code name for this serial would be "DETROIT."

We also learned to our dismay, that we would be going in at night because the paratroopers who preceded us could not wait until dawn for the anti-tank guns, ammunition, medics, jeeps, and medical supplies we would be carrying. This was a tough nut to swallow, since most of our training in the States, and in England, had been for early dawn of daylight landings. The thought of a night landing in enemy territory, in strange fields, with a heavily loaded glider, sounded like sure disaster. The only good news was that Mike Murphy, the senior Glider Officer in European Theater (ETO) had convinced the top brass that the English *Horsa* gliders we were supposed to fly would not be as suitable for night landings as the American CG-4As, and the switch was made at the last minute.

That afternoon (June 5), I went down to the flight line with Flight Officer (F/O) Bill Bruner, my co-pilot, to check out the CG-4A and went to meet our 101st passengers: Pfc. Paul Nagelbush, Pfc. Stanley Milewiski, and Pfc. Russell Kamp. They were members of the 81st AAA Bn, 101st Airborne Division. We would also be carrying supplies, ammunition, their 57mm anti-tank gun, entrenching tools, a camouflage net, and three boxes of rations. The total glider load was 3,750 lbs. Our C-47 tow plane flight crew was Pilot 1st Lt. David Whitmore, co-pilot Lt. G. Goulding; radio operator and crew chief were T/Sgt. F. Raymond, and S/Sgt. E. Harmon.

Take-off was scheduled for approximately 0:10 on the morning of the 6th, with touchdown scheduled in enemy territory at 4:00AM near Heisville. Our glider was No. 49 at the tail end of the 52-ship formation. Bill and I then went to the mess hall for the proverbial last meal, and those of us who felt the need, went to see the chaplain. A lot of us there hadn't been to church for quite some time. His tent was jammed.

At approximately 0:10AM, our tow ship gunned its engines and started down the runway through a light rain shower, into the black of night. As the wheels of our glider left the ground, someone in the back yelled: "Lookout Hitler, Here we come." That helped to break the ice for the moment. After that no one said a word, as I trimmed the glider for the long flight ahead. For the next three and one-half hours we would be alone with our thoughts and fears. It wasn't too bad for me because I was occupied flying the glider, but the Airborne men in back and Bill Burner had nothing to do. They must have been going through hell with their thoughts.

We settled down on tow, holding our position behind the C-47 by keeping the faint blue formation lights on top of the plane centered up in line between the faint glow of the tow plane's engine flame dampeners. This is not the easiest job in the world at night; the longer you stare, the more your eyes start to play tricks on you. I turned the controls over to Bruner occasionally so I could look away and get my eyes to refocus again. The added problem we faced was the extreme turbulence caused by all the planes ahead of us.

Shortly after we crossed the coast of France, small arms fire and heavier flak started coming up at the planes at the front of the formation, and intensified the closer we got to our landing zone (LZ). It looked like fluid streams of tracers zigzagging and hosing across the sky, mixed in with the heavier explosions of flak. One wondered how anything could fly through that and come out in one piece. After the front of the formation had passed over the German positions and woke them all up, we at the tail end of the line began to get hit by a heavier volume of small arms fire which sounded like corn popping, or typewriter keys banging on loose paper as it went through our glider. I tried to pull my head down into my chest to make myself as small as possible; I tucked my elbows in close to my body, pulled my knees together to protect my vital parts, and was even tempted to take my feet off the rudder pedals so they wouldn't stick out so far. I really started to sweat.

LOW CLOUDS AND FOG

A few minutes after we had crossed the coast, and before we reached our glider release point near Heisville, the group ran into some low lying clouds and fog banks. All the planes in the formation started to spread out to avoid collisions, and this caused many of us to land wide, short, and beyond our objective when we reached the cutoff point. In a very short time—too soon for me—the moment I was dreading arrived: the green light came on in the astrodome of the tow plane, indicating that we were over the LZ, and that it was time to cut off.

As soon as the rope disconnected from our glider, I started a 360-degree turn to the left, feeling my way down into the darkness, holding the glider as close to stalling speed as I could. It was almost impossible to describe one's feelings in a situation like this. You know the ground is down there, but you can't see it. You don't know if you're going to hit trees, ditches, or what, and all this time the flak and tracers are still coming up all around you. The only thing you know for sure is that Germans are shooting up at you, and they are going to be right there waiting for you when you climb out of your glider. You hope you will wake up and discover you're having a bad dream. They say fear has no bounds, and at this point I was in full agreement.

We still could not see a thing, and I knew that we were about to run out of altitude. Finally, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a faint light patch that looked like an open field outlined by trees. It was. By this time, we were so low that we had no choice in the matter. There would be no chance for a go-around. With a prayer on my lips, and a very tight pucker string, I straightened out my glide path and headed in. Bruner was holding full spoilers on.

We flared out for a landing just above the stalling speed, and touched down smooth as glass. I couldn't believe it; how lucky can you get? But just when we thought we had it made, there was a tremendous bone jarring crash. We had hit one of those ditches that the Germans had dug across the fields. Their main purpose was to prevent gliders from landing in one piece, and it sure worked with us. We plunged down into the ditch, and when the nose slammed into the other side, the glider's back broke as it slid up over the opposite bank.

The floor split open, and we skidded to a halt in the field on the other side. That ditch was ten to twelve feet across by five to six feet deep, with water in the bottom. For a split second we sat in stunned silence, and I breathed a sigh of relief because none of us seemed to be injured. We then bailed out fast because there was rifle and machine gun fire going off in the fields around us. Fortunately none seemed to be aimed at our field at the moment. It took us almost thirty minutes to dig the nose of the glider out of the dirt so we could open it up and roll out the anti-tank gun.

Midway through this task, the Germans set off a flare right over our heads, and lo and behold, we saw glider No. 50 piloted by Flight Officers Calvani and Ryan sitting on the other side of the ditch without a scratch on it. They were carrying the Jeep to tow our anti-tank gun. Calvani must have stuck right on my tail in the dark to land so close. I don't know how he managed to it.

We now had the job of digging a ramp down into and out of the ditch to get the jeep over to us. While this was going on, the naval bombardment started on the invasion beaches, and even though it was five miles away, the ground shook under our feet and the noise was unbelievable. I think we all said a few prayers for the kids who would be storming ashore and hoped they would be successful. Our own lives were at stake if they failed. We finally got the jeep across the ditch and the gun hooked up. I left the group and started off on foot to find the 101st Division CP (Command Post) at Heisville, and the gun crew took off towing the gun to find their unit, the 81st AAA Battalion.

A RIDE ON A JEEP

On my way through the hedgerows I stopped a jeep driven by a paratrooper who was headed in what we hoped was the right direction to the command post (CP). I hopped on the hood, and we started up a narrow path between the hedgerows. About five minutes later, some Germans opened up on us with machine pistol and rifle fire. I fell off the hood, and the jeep almost ran over me. That was enough. I got up and started off on my own again. A short time later, while walking up this same narrow lane, I glanced to my left and saw a rectangular opening at about waist height. A rifle barrel was sticking out pointed right at me. I froze in mid step, waiting for the bullet I thought had my name on it.

Nothing happened; the gun didn’t move. By now I was curious. I crawled over the hedge and looked in. It was a complete German bunker—large enough for five or six soldiers. Its sole occupant was a dead German; his rifle was poking through the slot. Thank God for the paratroopers who had taken care of him earlier, and probably left him in this position to scare some of their buddies. They succeeded. It scared the hell out of me. It also make me much more cautious, and I started to walk in a crouch, and kept my head on a swivel. The next German I saw was lying at a road junction in a pool of blood. He had just been hit by a mortar or shell fragment and was still alive. I felt horrible while I stood there watching him die knowing there was nothing I could do for him. I still had not developed the hate for the enemy. That came to me as the day progressed, and I saw and heard of what they had done to some of our airborne men. This German, lying in front of me, was a young kid, and sure didn't look like a Nazi Superman.

As I passed an opening through a hedgerow and looked through it, I saw a paratrooper out in the center of a large meadow standing alone. Being a little on the lonesome side by now, and a little curious as to why he was out there by himself, I walked out to see what the scoop was. As I approached him, I noticed that he was wearing an air force flak vest. I introduced myself to him and he thanked me for coming out to help him, but suggested I go find a flak vest to wear. Being a little naive, or just plain stupid, I asked him why, and he told me that there were German snipers in the Wood on the edge of the field, and he was trying to draw their fire so his buddies could nail them.

At this moment something went buzzing by my head, and I dropped to the ground. He remarked, while still standing straight up, " there's the son of a bitch now." Needless to say I wished him luck, picked myself up and beat a hasty retreat in search of a flak vest. I had no luck finding one from the wreckage of the gliders in the area. The paratroopers had grabbed them all for their own protection. I began to realize now that by walking around alone, I was asking to be knocked off by a sniper. At this point I still had not found the CP, or seen any other glider pilots.

By late afternoon after a few more encounters from sniper fire along the way, I arrived at the Division CP (101st) in Heisville and was assigned with other glider pilots to guard the perimeter in case the Germans tried to infiltrate back into what we thought was a secure area. We did not know it at the time, but they were all through the area-playing possum. Some of the snipers were still in trees around the area.

While resting in a courtyard in Heisville center, I heard and then saw a wagon coming down the lane being pulled by two paratroopers of the 101st. In the wagon, lying on top of a load of German mines and ammo was what looked like the body of another trooper. He wasn't dead or wounded, just zonked out from exhaustion. He had picked a hell of a bed to take a nap on. One mortar shell or rifle round in that wagon would have blown all three of them to hell and back. By this time we had all been awake 36 hours or more, and the pep pills we had been taking to keep us awake started to turn some of us into walking zombies. A few of the guys were out on their feet, and nothing could wake them up.

At 8:30AM, still 6th, some of us were asked to go back out into the fields to meet and cover the landing of the second series of gliders. A large group of *Horsa* gliders were expected to arrive at 0900, towed again by my group, the 434th from Aldermaston. They arrived right on time, and all hell broke loose. The Germans in the fields around us who had been playing possum, opened up on them with everything they had.

Their heavy ack-ack guns outside the perimeters were firing airbursts over and into the fields while the gliders were landing. The fields in this area around Hiesville were much too small for the large British Horsa gliders, and those that were not shot down, crashed head on into the hedgerows. Some were fortunate and made it down in one piece; others came under heavy enemy small arms fire after they had landed, and many of the glidermen and pilots were killed or captured while climbing out of their gliders. For an hour or so it was an awful mess, and the casualties in men and equipment were heavy before the situation stabilized.

After the gliders were unloaded and the casualties from the wrecks were taken care of, things settled down, and I went back to the CP to dig in for the night in an apple orchard behind a stable. While curled up in my foxhole trying to get some sleep, I suddenly recalled my boyhood days when I would get together with other kids in the neighborhood to play war. It was always the Yanks and the Huns, and here I was in 1944, in person, doing it for real.

RUMORS OF GERMAN PARATROOPERS

Shortly after dark, rumors started to spread between foxholes that there was a possibility that Germans were going to drop their own paratroopers in on us. This did nothing for our morale, and for the rest of the night we were spooked at the slightest sound, especially when we heard some planes go over quite low. Anyone who got out of his foxhole that night was taking his life in his own hands.

We got through the night and, in mid-morning of June 7, a call went out for volunteers to take over five hundred German prisoners down to the beach for transport back to England. The airborne men had captured so many of them that they were getting under foot and required too many people to guard them. Smart ass that I was, I asked the question "is the road to the beach open?" No one answered, so I volunteered anyway. With some of the glider pilots, many from my squadron, we lined the PWs up on the road and waited for the "OK" to take off. The Germans were more anxious to get out than we were. The war was over for them, and they wanted to get as far away as possible.

At this stage of the game most of us had just about reached the limits of endurance, so we gave the PWs most of our equipment to carry. One glider pilot was tempted to give them his Thompson sub-machine gun to carry, but on second thought decided it wouldn't look so good to the soldiers we would pass coming up from the UTAH Beach. On the march out, we kept going slower, and slower, and the PWs kept getting further ahead of us. Only by our making threats to shoot them did they slow down. The road to the beach was open, and by the time we got there, our butts were really dragging. It felt like we had walked twenty-five miles rather than five.

The sight on UTAH Beach was beyond belief. As far as the eye could see, to the left and the right, were men, trucks, tanks, vehicles of all types, and piles of equipment as high as houses. From the shore and out across the Channel was an endless line of merchant and warships of all sizes. The Navy ships were shelling targets inland around the clock. The saddest part was the long rows of wounded and dead laid out in rows on the sand, waiting to be loaded on ships.

The Navy Beach Master told us we would be going aboard LST 400 shortly and would be going back to England the following day. I immediately lay down in the sand and went sound asleep, in spite of all the noise. That night, German planes came in at low altitude and dropped mines around ships just offshore. The next morning we boarded the LST, but before any of the ships dared to pull up anchor, British mine sweepers came in close to sweep the area.

One of them hit a mine less than forty feet away from our LST and sank within two minutes. The force from the explosion scared the daylights out of us; we thought we had been torpedoed. The only survivor from the minesweeper was one of the stokers who was on deck getting some fresh air.

One thing that overwhelmed us on this Navy ship was the chow. They brought out fresh eggs, milk, ice cream, and steaks—and we gorged ourselves. One of the glider pilots went up to the skipper and told him there and then he wanted to transfer to the Navy, but it didn't work. Our good food back at the base was always powered eggs, powered milk, and SOS for breakfast.

BACK TO ENGLAND

The ship finally got us back to England, and eventually we arrived back at our home base at Aldermaston where they rolled out the red carpet for us. I guess they didn't think many of us would survive, and they couldn't do enough for us. After interrogation by the base intelligence officer, and after we had pinpointed on aerial photos our landing spots, we were all given three day passes. After that, the daily training routine began again and most of us went to a commando ground school at Ogburne St. George for further training in weapons and ground tactics. Many of us got in co-pilot time in C-47s on the resupply runs, so the time power boys who had been flying around the clock could get badly needed bouts of rest.

I remember almost everything about this "Normandy Mission" in great detail: from the takeoff, to boarding the LST for the return trip to England, and everything in between. After that, from the moment the anchor was pulled up on that LST and we started back England, my mind is an absolute blank. For the life of me I cannot remember crossing the Channel, where we landed, or how I got from the channel port back to the 434th Group at my home base at Aldermaston. The physical and mental stress, fear, and anxiety, from the last three days must have shorted out my brain circuits for this period of time.

PLEASE NOTE

Buckley attaches an addendum here, outlining the fate of several other gliders in this mission. All are historically significant and worthy of attention—but unfortunately, we have space for only Glider No 1, piloted by Lt. Col. Mike Murphy, flying with the 72nd TCS. This glider crashed into a line of trees on the edge of a field, killing the co-pilot, Lt. Robert butler, and Brig. Gen. Pratt, the Assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division. The Pathfinder pilot on board the tow plane, Major A.E. Robinson (from the 74th TCS} warned Murphy, just before they reached the LZ, that the wind had shifted. He replied, "that it was too late to change plans." Murphy's glider was overloaded and probably nose-heavy because of the steel plate that had been placed under the General’s jeep

The glider pilots of Troop Carrier Command had tasted their first combat. I'm sure that all of us who participated in this operation, came away with the knowledge that war is definitely not the glamorous, exciting game depicted in the movies or in the way we played it when we were kids. Those of us who have gone to war, and watched our friends die before our eyes, will have these haunting memories forever with us. We will treasure life as never before and grieve silently for our young friends and buddies who did not return home.

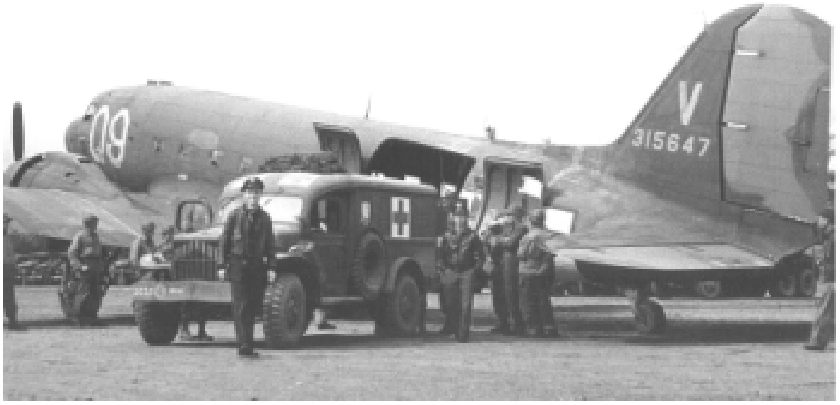
AIR EVACUATION AT NORMANDY

The grim follow-up

This photo was taken very soon after the landings. The aircraft is shown on the first temporary airstrip set up in France for this purpose—as well as for some resupply. Some of the C-47s had litters installed for the more serious cases, and flight nurses and medical corpsmen usually staffed these. The less serious patients were seated in the bucket seats, and accompanied by medical corpsmen only—depending on their condition.

In either case, it was only a short haul across the English Channel to proper hospitals. Chances are that the aircraft carried needed supplies on the trip over to France, and chances are about 50 to 50 that the crew loaded the airplane themselves, rather than wait for the Quartermaster troops to do it.

One of the nurses on a later mission must have been feeling philosophical that day. She was standing in the big cargo door watching an ambulance back up with another load of wounded. “You guys are crazy,” she said, “one day you fly a bunch of *Gung Ho* young men over here and drop them to face one of the best trained and highly disciplined armies in the whole world, and the next day, here you are again, hauling their battered selves back to get patched up as best we can do it under the circumstances. Then she said, almost to herself’ “I guess we’re all a little crazy to sit by and allow things to get so out-of-hand that they wind up like this.



The pilot of this mission, the one standing in front to the ambulance, was Captain George Merz. The co-pilot, the one standing at the rear of the ambulance, is 2nd Lt. Charles Johnson—both from the 61st Troop Carrier Squadron of the 314th Troop Carrier Group. Merz is still with us to provide pictures like this one (among other things), but Johnson was later killed on a resupply mission in Belgium. The crew chief and radio operator are unknown at this time.

Later on, troop carrier planes made regular runs from various stations in England to Prestwick, Scotland with patients who were being sent home for further treatment. Here they were transferred to larger Air Transport Command aircraft for the over-water flights.

It is sometimes interesting to look up the fate of airplanes such as this one. According to the book *THE DOUGLAS DC-3 and its predecessors*, it was delivered to the USAAF on April 22, 1944—and it was salvaged after an accident on November 11, 1946. It isn’t one that you might still see flying round, or displayed in a museum

Medical evacuation is another whole story, for another time.

THE IX TROOP CARRIER COMMAND IN WORLD WAR II

1943 - 1945

By George “Pete” Buckley

The IX Troop Carrier Command was constituted on the 11th of October 1943, and activated on the 16th of October 1943 in England, where it was assigned to the 9th Air Force. It was comprised of the 50th, 52nd, and 53rd Troop Carrier Wings. Its first commanding officer was BG Benjamin F. Giles who served from October 1943 to February 1944. He was succeeded by MG Paul L. Williams who served from February 1944 to March 1946.

The original cadre came from Headquarters 1st Troop Carrier Command (six officers only) and the 315th Troop Carrier Group. Its first temporary station was at USAAF #489 at Cottesmore, England, and on October I, 1943 it was joined by the 434th TC Group. At this time both the 315th and the 434th were assigned to the 50th TC Wing. Twelve airfields were assigned to the IX TC Command with each field to have forty gliders and tow planes. The fields were; Fulbeck, Langer, Bottesford, Wakerley, Balderton, North Witham, Barkston Heath, Cottesmore, North Luffenham, Saltby, Folkingham, and Woolfox Lodge.

In November 1943, the 435th TC Group and Welford Air Base were assigned to the 50th TC Wing, and IX TC Command Headquarters were moved to Grantham. Ramsbury, Aldermaston, and Greenham Cormmons also became available as landing areas for tactical training with the 101st Airborne Division.

In February 1944 the IX TC Command Pathfinder Group (Provisional) was formed at Cottesmore under the command of Lt Col Joel E Crouch. Also in February, the 440th and 439th TC Groups were assigned to the 50th Wing.

In the ETO, the Logistic and Support units that backed up the IX TC Command were:

U S Army Service Command
9th A/B Aviation Engineer Btn.
9th Air Force Service Command
8th Air Force Service command
Air Transport Operation Room
Troop Carrier Command Service
2nd Quartermaster Mobile Btn.
490th Quartermaster Depot Co.

Without these major support units and their auxiliary units, IX Troop Carrier Command and Airborne Services would not have been able to fulfill their assigned tasks.

In 1944, IX Troop Carrier Command became an important component of the First Allied Airborne Army, under the direct jurisdiction of Lt. General Lewis Brereton.

Few people at that time (and even today) are aware of the crucial role that Troop Carrier Forces played in WW II. Troop Carrier crews and glider pilots often flew sorties in their unarmed planes and gliders deep into enemy territory, under 1,000 feet, to deliver men and equipment to targets that were usually defended by enemy troops. This was accomplished through heavy flak and small arms fire, with standing orders not to take evasive action. Glider Pilots, after landing, fought with the Airborne troops to clear the enemy from landing and drop zones Theirs was a dual job pilots in the air, infantry on the ground.

The combined efforts of Troop Carrier forces in Europe and in the Pacific contributed greatly to the eventual collapse of the Axis powers in WW II. Some of these TC Groups are still flying actively today as Military Airlift Wings.

At a meeting between Generals Arnold, Spatz, Bradley, and Major General Paul Williams in April of 1944, General Bradley told General Williams that his armies could not have maintained their rapid advance across France without the supplies laid down by Troop Carrier Command.

PASS IN REVIEW

Most WW II Airborne veterans and Troop Carrier veterans have long ago hashed over the Normandy D-Day flights—but not all. There is still some lively discussion.

There are a few left who haven't satisfied themselves—enough that portions of a letter that Col. Joe Harkiewicz wrote to his squadron mates in 2001 are included here. Col. Harkiewicz served as the historian for the 29th Troop Carrier Squadron for many years before he passed away. He was an avid historian, and was extremely impatient with the unprofessional behavior of today's Commercial "Pop" historians."

At any rate, here are some passing thoughts from his notes:

"It is prudent to remind everyone that IX Troop Carrier Command had no voice in selecting the invasion date, or any choice in the kind of weather we were ordered to fly in. We assembled and took off as ordered, and flew the mission as best we could under the conditions we faced. And most surprising of all, there was no contingency plan from SHAEF for coping with the marginal weather.

SPEED FOR REAL

"There are also reports in the "pop histories" about the speed of some of the aircraft during the drops. These reports claim witness to odd altitudes and excessive speeds over the drop zones. In the ways of war, some of this may have happened, but from USAAF archives, and from readily available airborne records, it appears far from the norm.

Most Troop Carrier veterans who read the "pop histories," or who watch the "pop TV" reports, are skeptical of these claims—simply because there is no viable way for anyone in the back of a dark C-47 to read its altitude and airspeed. Not even experienced crew chiefs and radio operators could do that. It is even more difficult from the ground."

THE ILLUSION OF SPEED

"This is tricky, not easy—but here is why some paratroopers may have thought their C-47 gained speed as it approached the drop zone. There are two main power settings for a C-47—the manifold pressure (a measure of the power that propels the airplane through the air)—and the revolutions per minute of the engines. And adjusting these together was a technique used during every landing to slow the airplane down before touchdown. When some C-47 pilots wanted to reduce power and slow down to lose altitude quickly during a paradrop, they reduced the manifold pressure (the driving power), and then increased the revolutions to about 2300. The windmilling effect of this faster rpm acted as an air brake. Most of us have had a plastic toy windmill blade on a stick that we waved around or held out of a car window to make it turn. The principle is the same. The airflow required to keep the plastic blade turning without applying driving power to it acted as a brake, while the toy turned faster and whizzed louder.

So it was with the engines. Our formations were briefed to fly over the coast at 1,500 ft. to stay above small arms fire—and then to descended to 700 ft. for the paradrop. The pilots reduced the manifold pressure and started to slow down—although the sound of the advancing revolutions could have been misleading. This sounded like more power, but it was just more noise that led some paratroopers to think the speed was increasing when actually it was decreasing.

Also, upon reaching drop altitude, an increase in power (throttle) was usually applied to hold and maintain drop altitude and speed. This had to be done very carefully to keep the airplanes slow and level, without flaps, and without raising the nose. At slower speeds (drop speed) it's much harder to control a C-47. It can be a fight to just hold it straight and level while being buffeted by prop Wash. This could have caused some paratroopers to believe the pilots were increasing their airspeed."

THE PLUS SIDE

"For almost every "pop history" story that might benefit from further checking, Troop Carrier aircrews can document incidents where pilots made multiple passes at the DZs, or held burning aircraft straight and level while the troopers jumped. Several of these reports of dedication and heroism that troop carriers remember with pride, are fully supported in this publication."

THE 200 MPH C-47

"In a recent (2001) History Channel report, it was claimed that a unit of the 101st Airborne Division was flown across the drop zone in a C-47 at 200 mph. This bears checking into; most C-47s just won't go that fast in level flight. This might have happened if the pilots were incapacitated (dead/wounded) and no longer in control, and the aircraft was in a power dive. There could have been such cases."

SCATTERIING

"The Troop Carrier delivery formation of nine aircraft, V of V's like a flock of geese, was designed to put the aircraft in the closest proximity to each other and still avoid turbulence from the preceding aircraft. This is called a *serial*, and the only way to drop paratroopers close together is for the aircraft to fly close together and release them at nearly the same time. On D-Day when the aircraft suddenly found themselves in the clouds, the integrity of much of the formation was lost. This, not bad navigation, is the reason for some paratroopers being scattered around the Cherbourg Peninsula. It was not lack of training in night formation, or in combat experience. And the many stories of flight crews making return passes over their DZs to drop their troops must be weighed against any conjecture of cowardice among the flight crews.

Trying to orient oneself after coming out of the clouds was all but impossible. Pilotage (navigating by visual means) depends upon following landmarks, one connecting to the other. Ground vision was lost while in the clouds, thus disrupting this continuity. The darkness of night, the blackout conditions on the ground, the loss of night vision (compromised by explosions from enemy fire), and the lack of functioning radio-radar aids, made things even harder.

Purely and simply, once the formation went into the clouds, some pilots lost their way. Re-establishing themselves accurately was next to impossible, and the scattering of paratroopers was inevitable. Even today, with the most modern equipment, military paratroopers still need visual flying conditions if they are to drop their troops together."

JOSTLING

"Much has been said over the years by the observers and "pop historians" about dodging flak and small arms fire—and this needs to be addressed.

- "Once you see the explosion of an anti-aircraft shell (flak), it has done its potential damage, and there is no further use in trying to avoid it.
- If there was any dodging, it most likely occurred when trying to get out of a *lock-on* by German searchlights. The odds for survival in this situation were very low.
- Jostling the paratroopers could have been caused by nearby flak explosions, turbulence from prop wash caused by the disrupted formations, and/or abrupt maneuvering control to avoid other aircraft.
- Panic was possible, but there has been very little of this documented—either among the aircrew or among the paratroopers. **That is what one would expect of Americans."**

IX TROOP CARRIER COMMANDS FINAL AND FINEST EFFORTS

By George “Pete” Buckley, 74th TCS, 434th TCG

In the closing days of war in Europe, in April of 1945 Troop carrier planes flew a total of 16,387 sorties, many of them in the face of enemy flak and small arms fire. By April 20th, Troop Carrier Command had used 240 airfields from Cherbourg to Leipzig for these sorties,

The first 20 days of April 1945, saw 35,962 wounded evacuated from forward battle areas by Troop Carrier Crews. For the First Time in History, general hospitals were able to stay up to 300 miles in the rear because of the speed and efficiency of the Air Forces in evacuating casualties. The most serious cases were flown directly to England.

In the same time span, IX Carrier planes during the German Campaign delivered 44,212,200 tons of freight, and 7,727,075 gallons of gasoline to our rapidly moving ground forces. On April 4th alone, they deliveied to the front more tonnage in this single day than the entire tonnage for the first 3 months of 1945. From the airstrips all over Germany, they flew 451000 American, British, French Russians, Poles and Italians released prisoners of war back from the areas of their captivity in Germany. This was truly a monumental effort and successful accomplishment on the part of all those C-47 Squadrons and their supporting ground crews—and all of this activity at this point in time surpassed the activities of both the Eighth and in the Ninth Air Forces.

On the 9th of April 1945, one of Troop Carriers smoothest operations of the war was demonstrated in and around the town of Crailsheim, in Germany. A US Armored spearhead, Combat Command A, of the lOth Armored Division had advanced so far and so fast, that they were pinched off and surrounded by units of an Alpine Regiment, and a German battalion of SS training units.

Short of gasoline and ammunition, the Americans sent out an urgent SOS for aid. Twenty two supply trucks rounded up from the VI Corps that attempted to break through to them were destroyed by a determinedly and desperate enemy intent on wiping out this American group that was just as a determined. At this point, Troop Carrier seemed to be the only answer.

Thirty four C-47s of the 441st Group, loaded with 160,00 pounds of gasoline, 37,865 pounds of ammunitions and 5,400 pounds of K-rations took off from Dreux, France. They hedgehopped and flew on the deck through heavy flak and small arms fire and landed in a small cow pasture just outside of Crailsheim. The enemy, only 1,500 yards away, kept the field under consent shellfire-destroyed one plane.

One other plane was lost on the way in (hitting a hill in the fog.) The remaining aircraft with 42 wounded on board made some very heavy take-offs and arrived back at base with four planes heavily damaged from enemy fire.

The next day, the same thing with 16 C-47s. As a direct result of this Army Air Forces effort by the 441st Group, the beleaguered armored unit was able to fight its way out of the pocket with over 2,000 prisoners. This is only a small part of the overall picture of Troop Carriers at the end of the war, and in the periods afterwards.

With the ground transportation systems in Germany in such bad shape from attacks by the Army Air Forces, the only way of getting around was by Air, and the ever-faithful C-47.

THE LEGEND OF THE DC-3—AND THE C-47 THAT EVOLVED

From the 315th Troup Carrier Group Newsletter

Wingspan	95.6 Ft.	Engines	Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp R-1830. 1200 hp
Length	64.6 Ft		
Height	18.3 Ft.	Propellers	Hamilton Standard 3E5U
Wing area	987 Sq. Ft.	Range	1500 miles
Top speed	232 mph	Cruising speed	175 mph
Crew	5	Cost	$138.000
Load	3 tons or more—or—18 fully equipped paratroopers		

The military C-47 was an outgrowth of the DC-3 (Douglas Commercial model 3), which was in turn an outgrowth of the DC-2. Most of the preliminary design work was done in the early 30s at the request of the airline industry. Shortly after the war began, scores of commercial DC-3s were hustled into the Army, Navy and Marine air arms, until a high-level production of military versions could be obtained. This was quickly done, and the C-53 soon began making its appearance on the extending routes. The C-53 was identical to the commercial airliner, except for the substitution of bucket seats for the more luxurious reclining seats. It was solely a personnel carrier—no freight, no heavy lifting.

Conversion of the DC-3 to a true cargo plane involved many changes. First, it called for a reinforced bottom and floor, and a wide loading door capable of admitting heavy machinery and weapons. Also numerous changes in production were necessary if these planes were to be turned out in volume. Hand riveting was replaced by automatic riveting wherever possible. Fiber replaced aluminum in many parts of the aircraft interior. Forging was used on certain parts instead of gas welding, and flash welding was introduced extensively. All this was accomplished with no loss of strength—and frequently with greater ease of interchange or replacement of parts.

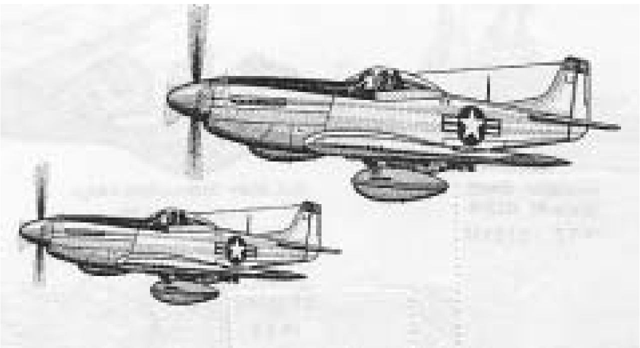
By September 1943, more than 2000 C-47s had been built at Douglas' Long Beach CA. plant. By February of 1944, more than 2,500 C-47s were being flown by Air Transport Command alone, to say nothing of another couple of thousand by Troop Carrier and other Army units— and by the Navy and Marines. The interior of the plane was so rigged that litters could be installed quickly, transforming it into what was, in every sense, a hospital plane. Soon it was found that the C-47 was a fine glider tow-plane because of its robust construction—and if became the first plane ever to tow a glider across the Atlantic.

The C-47 was flown in troop carrier operations in all theaters, but it is best known for its combat roles in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, Holland, and Germany. These were the *glamour missions,* the ones that earned medals, but many other missions were flown carrying tons of critical freight wherever needed. Return trips often carried the injured and the wounded.

Many of the C-47s flown in the invasion of Normandy were from a special order known as the "Urgent 400." These were extra planes that General Arnold requested the Douglas Company to produce over their full schedule—specifically for Invasion needs. These were given a top manufacturing priority over and above all other aircraft in production—including fighters, medium bombers, and heavy bombers.

FIGHTER COVER

Our Little Friends Were There Too



The following is from the book ***PURSUE and DESTROY*** by now deceased Kit Carson of the 357th Fighter Group. It is pertinent here because without proper fighter cover and tactical air cover, we would have faced worse odds. Everyone played a part.

5 June 1944.

> "By noon of that day our little spot in East Anglia was rampant with rumors that D-Day was at hand. At 2:00PM, the Colonel asked to see all three engineering officers. They were told to paint eighteen inch black and white stripes on the Mustangs, five on the wings and five on the fuselage. 'Tell your men that this is to identify our group as the Yoxford Boys' if they ask questions,' he said, knowing that they would ask and also knowing that they would realize it was a very thin smoke screen for hiding the real reason.
>
> Paint guns appeared and things got busy. Our squadron CO, Major Broadhead, was in the hangar holding up a piece of canvas masking tape, while 'Frenchy' Boudreaux, the squadron painter, was busy with the spray gun. The stripes on the wings were trim, but those on the empennage spoiled the profile. 'Looks like a pregnant turtle,' opined Captain Willie (Calvert) Williams, our Operations officer. Rumors came and went out of the squadron like water from a burst pipe. 'Hey, I just heard in group Operations that the 'cloak and dagger boys' (Intelligence) are in a big scramble and they're not talking, etc.'
>
> ### BET ON D-DAY
>
> By evening chow time, you could get an even bet on D-Day being the next morning, the 6th, or the day after. The officer's club looked like the Last Chance Saloon on Saturday night. Every officer had either a shoulder holster or one on his hip with a .45 Colt in it, or a carbine, and the smoke filled room needed only the reclining figure of Lillian Russell or Goya's Duchess to complete the picture. Carson was scheduled for a 0400 take-off. Captain Bill O'Brien, a 363rd Squadron old timer, has vivid memories of this:

> "The Briefing placed take-off at 2:10AM, June 6th, on an what turned out to be an uneventful mission. The flights assembled over the field, and then flew to the area of the Bay of Biscay to sweep for opposition. This fine idea required a night take-off and night formation work. The weather was poor, solid overcast to 7,000 feet. The result was no one got into formation at low altitude while circling the field. We got on top of the clouds and started looking for our respective flights and squadrons. I couldn't find anyone who was supposed to be with me, and about that time a P-51 came strolling by with his navigation lights on so I tacked on to him. The two of us were joined by another lonesome P-51 so the guy in the 'lighted plane set course. As the 363rd was the lead squadron, I felt comfortable with whoever was leading
>
> Well, anyway, away we go, and finally the sun comes up and we are stooging around somewhere. I slid in close trying to observe the guy in the lead trying to orient himself with what coastline we could see. I felt sorry for him. Magellan couldn't have helped us.
>
> After horsing around like this for six hours, fifty minutes, we are back at Leiston. All planes taxi back to dispersal, and out steps Graham, our leader, and his wingmen Anderson and O'Brien! How wonderful, a group leader without a group, and a squadron leader without a squadron, and two flight leaders without flights.
>
> Although Graham and company stooged around for almost seven hours and found no enemy aircraft, and no friendlies either, the rest of the 363rd and the 364th were out somewhere in the same general area. They saw nothing either, but the early morning fiasco cost two aircraft and the life of one pilot. Roger Pageis was last seen at take-off, but nothing is known of him, except group *records* list him as "escapee".

Captain LeRoy Ruder's flight was patrolling in the Cherbourg area over 10/10th cloud when he called his element leader, Mark Stepelton and said his engine was ailing. He then let down into the clouds, saying he could see the ground and was going to crash land. Stepelton followed him down, but saw no sign of him, and Ruder did not survive. Willard Bierly, his armorer, remembers that early morning departure:

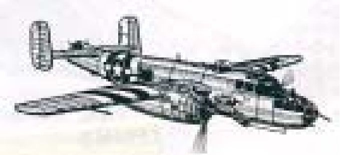
"Strapped in his cockpit, he asked if he could borrow my knife, as he had forgotten his. This was a precaution to puncture his dinghy, should it accidentally inflate in the cockpit. He never returned my knife."

EIGHT MISSIONS

The group flew a total of eight missions, and except for the first, all were in squadron strength. One aborted due to icing, the others were all bombing or strafing. On the third mission, Lt. Irving Smith flew into heavy overcast and was never seen again.

June, with D-Day in its first week, was one of the most momentous times of World War II, and brought with it, briefly, a different kind of war. It had been a machine gun war, but now there were a large number of bombs on the racks to be dumped on all kinds of rail, road, and airfield targets. Glide bombing, skip bombing, and dive-bombing; all were tried, sometimes with good results. During two weeks prior to the 20th, there were only two brief skirmishes with enemy aircraft, with nine claims. For all of June there were only twenty-nine claims, twenty of these in a big battle on the 29th. During the month nine pilots were lost—relatively light losses compared to other periods.

The fighter groups contributed heavily to the success of D-Day. They not only protected the Troop Carriers, but many others throughout the war. Needless to say, we were all very grateful to see P-51s and our own medium bombers flying around us—rather than Me 109s.



Medium bombers, like B-25s and Marauders, also helped soften up the defenses

Part 3

The Troop Carrier D-Day Flights

FOR THE RECORD

This is a letter from Brig. Gen. James Gavin in France to a friend in England to comment on the fine manner in which AAF planes carried US Army paratroopers to the jump locations on D-Day. Mr. R. J. Stewart, San Diego, CA, donated this letter to the US Air Force Museum.

June 9th (1944)

Dear Hal, (General Harold L. Clark, commanding 52nd Troop Carrier Wing)

Through the courtesy of Col. (Bruce D.) Bidwell who is leaving the beachhead today I am able to get this short note to you.

Task force "A" has accomplished most of its objectives—the 505th carrying out its mission exactly as planned. Ste. Mere Eglise was taken two hours after landing and the 507th and 508th are holding the line of the Merderet.

Lt. Col. Thomas J. B. Shanley, (commanding 2nd Battalion, 508th), Col. George V. Millett Jr. (commanding 507th) and Lt. Col. Charles J. Timmes, (commanding 2nd Battalion. 507) are still cut off but we may be able to pull them out in the next 24 hours.

The accomplishments of the parachute regiments are due to the conscientious and efficient tasks of delivery performed by your pilots and crews. I am aware, as we all are, that your Wing suffered losses in carrying out its missions and that a very bad fog condition was encountered inside the west coast of the peninsula. Yet despite this, every effort was made for an exact and precise delivery as planned. In most cases this was successful.

I want to express to you and all of the officers and enlisted men of your command our appreciation for a job damn well done.

James Gavin

PS. Generally speaking all is going well, the 506th has done remarkably well, although it has taken heavy casualties in spots.

Would you please call Col. (Joel L.) Crouch (commanding IX TCC Pathfinder) and express to him our appreciation for a job well done.

Jim

OTHER AIRBORNE COMMENTS

The officers who commanded the paratroops were aware of the problems of Troop Carrier aircrews and very soon after D-Day, the following letters (excerpts) were received by the Commanding General of Troop Carrier Command.

****

HEADQUARTERS, 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION 8 JUNE 1944

Please express to all elements of your command who brought this division in by parachute or who performed resupply missions for us, our admiration for their coolness under fire, for their determination to overcome all obstacles and for their magnificent spirit of cooperation.

Mathew B. Ridgway, Maj. General
82nd Airborne Division

****

Brig. General Paul Williams endorsed this statement by General. Ridgway. "The fact that General. Ridgway, under the stress of battle, felt it necessary to forward that basic letter is particularly pleasing and will serve as additional evidence of his appreciation of a task well performed. I can only add my sincere appreciation for your loyalty and devotion to duty."

Brig. General Paul Williams
IX Troop Carrier Command

****

FROM THE 101st AIRBORNE DIVISION ARCHIVES

> At 10:15 pm, June 5, 1944, 6,600 soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division began taking off aboard 1,432 C-47 transport aircraft from England. Shortly after midnight, the C-47s were over UTAH and the 101st Paratroops began hitting the silk. Problems began immediately. Because of heavy enemy fire, many of the transports had taken evasive action and could not find the proper drop zones. In addition, dense fog blanketed the area.

Editorial comment: The 1,432 is probably a typographical error. There were only 821 Troop Carrier C-47s in the entire mission. The order of encountering the ground fire and the fog is reversed, and this order changes the meaning. The fog came first, which caused the formation to scatter to avoid massive collisions. Any evasive action would have come later by individual aircrews suddenly separated from the guidance and control of the formation.

****

General Omar Bradley was not Airborne, but this is what he was quoted as saying in the book A General's Life: Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 247

> *"Owing to foul weather and the anxiety and inexperience of some transport pilots, most of the American paratroopers were scattered far and wide of their objectives. Only a few units were able to organize and fight as planned."*

Editorial Comment: Military historians, almost without exception, have the greatest respect for General Bradley—and so do we. But we wonder if his views might not have been a bit different then—if he had known all the details that we have been able to document since.

U.S. Army
Parachutist Wings

DEBRIEFING CONFERENCE - OPERATION NEPTUNE

In the search for accuracy, a copy of the report of this conference was obtained from the US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle PA. The full report can be reviewed on the Institutes web site, which is presdoc.pl?docnum=32

A more general web site is listed as US Army Military History Institute.

This was an 82nd Airborne session that was held at the Globe Mount House, Leicester, England on 13 August 1944. Each commander present who had commanded a battalion or larger of the 82nd Airborne Division in OPERATION NEPTUNE was permitted to talk—not to exceed ten minutes. Instructions were that each officer was to speak freely, without restraint, regarding any aspect of the operation during its airborne phase, and to offer any criticism he saw fit in the interests of improving our operational techniques in future combat.

Commanders spoke in the same order their landings were scheduled. Their statements were taken down verbatim as far as possible. At the conclusion of the conference, considerable free-for-all discussion took place, of which no record was kept. However, it did have a strong bearing on the conclusions attached to this report, which is a 15-page document in very fine print.

Most of the content revolved around infantry planning and procedures after landing, but there were some common observations about the flights and delivery that can be digested for Troop Carriers here. Some said that their flight was too fast and too low, while others complained about being dropped too high. And all agreed that the formations held together very well across the channel and until they ran into the dense fog that shrouded the last leg of their flights to their objectives.

If you are interested in the details, please go to the web site. If you only wish to read the conclusions, here they are:

- Weather Conditions—It is interesting to note in Operation NEPTUNE that weather conditions were almost ideal until shortly after crossing the west coast of the peninsula. There a dense fog was encountered that lasted almost up to the Merderet River. This caused considerable dispersion and error in the drop of the 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments, with the error generally being that of dropping well beyond the drop zone where the fog first cleared. Unfortunately, this put most of the equipment in the Merderet River or the swamps or tributaries of that river.

- The 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment jumped east of the Merderet River, landed with most of its men in the drop zone area, and promptly undertook to accomplish its mission. The 507th and 508th Infantries, with equal promptness, moved to accomplish what was considered the next most important mission, and that was the seizure of crossings over the Merderet River. Due to the wide dispersion of these units, this took a bit more time than was anticipated.

- A number of airborne commanders present suggested that it be recommended to Troop Carrier commanders that they conduct unit proficiency test similar to those conducted in this Division. Each unit to be given a mission to execute under simulated combat conditions.

The Troop Carriers who reviewed this asked, to the man: “How does one train to continue to fly a tight formation when suddenly engulfed in a dense fog? You cannot fly formation on an aircraft you can’t see. And what kind of training might have been devised to condition pilots to fly through flak and ground fire without actually firing at them in the training session?”

GLOSSARY

AA	Anti Aircraft Fire
AAA	Anti Aircraft Fire
Ack-Ack	Anti Aircraft Fire
AFB	Air Force Base
AMC	Air Mobility Command
C-47	USAAF Cargo model 47 derivative of Douglas DC-3
C-53	USAAF Cargo model 53 derivative of Douglas DC-3
CG-4A	Cargo Glider model 4A
CO	Commanding Officer
CP	Command Post
DC-2	Douglas Commercial model 2
DC-3	Douglas Commercial model 3
D-DAY	6 June 1944 for the Normandy invasion
DETROIT	Code name for Glider mission, 6 June 1944
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DSC	Distinguished Service Cross
DZ	Drop Zone Paratroopers and parachute cargo
EAGLE	The major practice mission for NEPTUNE
Eureka	Ground radar unit interrogated by Rebecca
FLAK	Anti Aircraft Fire
FORTITUDE	Deceptive invasion plan to confuse the Germans
HACK	Word used to indicate when watches were synchronized
Horsa	British cargo & troop carrying glider
LCVP	Landing craft Vehicle Personnel
LSI	Landing Ship Infantry
LST	Landing Ship Tanks
LZ	Landing Zone for Gliders
NEPTUNE	Code name for the D-Day Normandy invasion
Nose code	Combination number–letter code for each aircraft
OMAHA	Code name for one of the landing beaches
PW	Prisoner of War
Rebecca	Airborne radar interrogator to query Eureka
Serial	Designation for a flight of airplanes dedicated to one purpose. For D-Day, each serial was a V of Vs of nine. See page 12
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces
SOS	Emergency distress signal
TCS	Troop Carrier Squadron
UK	United Kingdom
UTAH	Code name for one of the landing beaches
WW II	World War Two

MY THANKS TO ALL FRIENDS, ASSOCIATES, AND RESOURCES WHO HELPED WITH THIS

GREEN LIGHT—book by S/Sgt. Martin Wolfe, Radio Operator, 436th TCG, 81st TCS.

Shared historical research of 1st Lt Neal Beaver, 81 mm Mortar Platoon, 3rd Battalion, Headquarters Company, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division.

INTO THE VALLEY—book by Col. Charles H. Young, USAF (Ret) TC Group Commander and pilot, 439th Troop Carrier Group—with special thanks to his son Charles D. Young, editor.

The AIR MOBILITY COMMAND MUSEUM STAFF.

ON WINGS OF TROOP CARRIERS—book by S/Sgt. Robert Callahan, Radio Operator, 314th TCG, 50th TCS.

The History of The 50th Troop Carrier Squadron of the 314th Troop Carrier Group WW II by T/Sgt. Bob Bramble, Crew Chief.

Shared historical research from S/Sgt. Michael Ingrisano, Troop Carrier Radio Operator, 316th TCG, 37th TCS.

Shared historical research from Randolph Hils, son of WW II Troop Carrier Sgt. Ralph Hils, 440th TCG.

History of the 32nd Troop Carrier Squadron by 1st Lt Donald vanReken, Troop Carrier pilot, 314th TCG, 32nd TCS.

WE ARE THE 29th TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON—book by Joseph Harkiedwics Col USAF retired.

Personal files of LC George Merz (Ret.), Troop Carrier Pilot, Flight Leader. 314th TCG, 61st TCS.

George “Pete” Buckley, 74th Troop Carrier Squadron, 434th Troop Carrier Group.

A GENERAL’S LIFE—An autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley.

Personal files and records of 1st Lt Lewis E. Johnston, Troop Carrier Pilot, historian, 314th TCG, 61st TCS.

The diary of T/Sgt. Winfield E. “Bing” Wood, Troop Carrier Crew Chief, 314th TCG, 61st TCS.

VINCIT QUI PRIMUM GERIT—book by William H. Hughes. The Story of the 349th TCG in WW II.

PURSUE & DESTROY—book by Kit Carson, 357th Fighter Group.

PERSONAL FILES of Kenneth K. Robertson, Jr.—Author of Operation Nickel Grass

The U S Army Military History Institute.

AIR ASSAULT—book by John R. Galvin.

Major General (Ret) John Moench, 9th Air Force Archivist.

Richard Ellinger—Editor, THE MARAUDER THUNDER.

IMAGINAIR DESIGNS—Aviation Stamps.

101st Airborne Division History Website.

Debriefing Conference - Operation Neptune, 82nd Airborne Division.

THE GLIDER GANG—book by Dr. Milton Dank

Troop Carrier Unit Contacts database, LC Robert L. Cloer, Troop Carrier Pilot, 315th TCG, 34th TCS.

USAF Historical Studies No. 97. Airborne Operations in World War II, European theater—by Dr. John Warren.

Charles D. Young, and Charlotte and Albert Kissling for their editorial assistance.

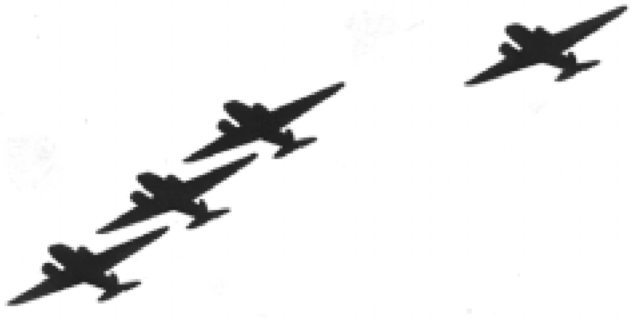
AND I APOLOGIZE TO ANYONE I MAY HAVE OVERLOOKED

THE TROOP CARRIER D-DAY FLIGHTS

Conclusions

- D-Day Normandy took place 58 years ago today—6 June 1944. If you were there, and you are reading this, you are one lucky ‘ol boy.
- The true HISTORY of this mission can never be told accurately until it is balanced with accounts from the Pilots, as well as the airborne forces.
- The impressions being circulated in books and TV documentaries today are based on incomplete data–and as a result, their conclusions are subject to question.
- The majority of oral reports of this mission given by paratroop veterans were spoken in good faith. They reported what they saw, and believed it to be true.
- As a matter of general interest, professional archivists like Major General (Ret) John Moench warn us that casual oral histories are often incomplete and unreliable —and to be safe, they should always be thoroughly checked.
- The records, both Airborne and Air Forces, show that Troop Carrier played a crucial role in the success of the D-Day mission. A few individuals, largely undocumented, differ.
- The pilots were thoroughly trained and qualified. The records show that they flew a complex mission flawlessly until encountering low clouds and blinding fog.
- Although the fog made for less-than-perfect delivery, the Airborne forces did a remarkable job of gathering fighting units together, and achieving their goals.
- The casualties on Utah Beach where there was airborne support were considerably lower than Omaha Beach, where no airborne forces were placed between the beach and the German defenders. There was more to this, of course.
- The paratroopers had no way of knowing how impossible it was to maintain command discipline and flight control of a tight formation in “zero-zero” operating visibility. And there was no way to tell them. Many still may not know.
- Many individual pilots, suddenly forced to make all the crucial command decisions on their own with little or no visibility, and with no SHAEF contingency plan, did a remarkable job of finding the drop zones on their own for the paratroopers.
- Some evasive action has been reported by both airborne forces and Troop Carrier crews, but the amount and the timing differs. Most official reports, both Airborne and Troop Carrier, place this as happening after the fog. A few paratroopers (very few) place it before, and speculate that it was the result of panic.
- When things did not go as planned, American ingenuity and initiative took over at all levels to save the day.
- There were many outstanding acts of bravery, both in the air and on the ground in the D-Day assault—and many wonderful stories have been told about the Troop Carrier and Airborne forces—but there are many yet to be heard
- There is an obvious need for better understanding between the Troop Carrier veterans and some of the Airborne veterans. It is not too late, but the time is rapidly running out.

LEST WE FORGET!



The Missing Man Formation

Often flown over burial ceremonies to honor the dead—much like the honored tradition of the riderless horse in military funeral processions.

The open space represents the warm place in our hearts for those no longer with us—both the Army Air Forces and the Airborne Forces..

The Troop Carrier D-Day Flights

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