

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

On 27 November 1942, Thomas W. Porcella enlisted in the United States Army, volunteered for paratrooper duty and was inducted at Whitehall Street, New York City. He was sent to Camp Upton, New York and Camp Toccoa, Georgia, and then to Camp Blanding, Florida, to be part of the Third Battalion of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. In Camp Blanding he received army basic training and preparation for parachute school. At Fort Benning, Georgia, he qualified as a parachutist, earning his Silver Wings in March 1944.

In April of 1943 the regiment was stationed at Camp Mackall, North Carolina, for advanced military training. The 508th left for Camp Shanks, New York, in preparation for overseas duty in December 1943. The ship, (James Parker) safely delivered the 508th at Belfast harbor, Northern Ireland in January 1944. March of 1944 found them in Nottingham, England for final training before the invasion of Normandy, France.

Upon his discharge in January, 1946, he was awarded the following decorations: The Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Distinguished Unit Emblem, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal and the Combat Infantry Badge. Also Army of Occupation Medal, French Fourragere, Belgian Fourragere and Netherlands Orange Lanyard.

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Your contribution to war literature by describing combat from the level of a front line infantry soldier, who bears the brunt of battle, will be refreshing and welcome.

General M.B. Ridgway

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to my wife Molly and to my daughters, Christine and Mary, for their cooperation in the writing of this book. Without their help it could not have been possible for me; to put my stories in print.

My thanks to Joe Madden who spent many days researching material in the National Archives, Washington, D. C.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

21 Jun 80.

Dear Porcella,

I appreciate your letter, and most of all the service we shared in WW II in Europe from England to the Baltic, with the epic D-Day drop into Normandy.

You have my permission to use the quotations from my book: SOLDIER, though if they much exceed fifty words, it might be well to ask the permission of Harper & Row of New York, the successor to the publisher, Harper & Brothers. I am sure its permission would be granted.

Your contribution to war literature, by describing combat from the level of the front line infantry soldier, who bears the brunt of battle, will be refreshing and welcome.

With best wishes,

Sincerely/
signed/ [M. B. Ridgway](#)
M. B. Ridgway

Mr. Tom Porcella
17 Westwood Road South
Massapequa, New York
11762

P.S. If I have misspelled your name, I apologize. I can not be sure if the ending is an "a", or "ci"

initialed / [M.B.R](#)

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

JUMP INTO DARKNESS, and the ensuing battles, have been forever etched in the minds of those who survived. I have written what I can remember of my experiences in the swamps, fields and hedgerows. My writings are dedicated to those who are no longer with us to tell their part in the invasion of Normandy.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

PRELUDE

Many months of planning and preparation preceded the 6 June 1944 D-Day landings in Normandy. Beginning in March of 1944 Allied Air Forces disrupted transportation between the Seine and Loire rivers and conducted strategic air bombardment deep into enemy territory, in an attempt to keep the German Air Force occupied and on the defensive and to isolate the landing areas.

On 6 June 1944 during the early morning hours of darkness, three airborne divisions, the British 6th, and the United States 82nd and 101st, were dropped to the rear of the beach area to cover deployment of the seaborne assault forces. Simultaneously, allied naval forces swept the English Channel of mines and preceded the assault vessels to the landing areas. At 6:30 a.m. under cover of intense naval and air bombardment, six U.S, British and Canadian divisions began landing on Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches in what was to be the greatest amphibious assault in recorded history.

The U.S 4th division landed at Utah beach and pushed rapidly- inland to join the Airborne divisions. The early success and light casualties on Utah beach contrasted sharply with the difficulties of the U.S, 1st and 29th divisions on Omaha beach to the East, where the enemy was resisting with every device and weapon at his disposal. Its terrain alone was a major obstacle. Instead of sloping to the East, the beach area terminated in precipitous steep sandy bluffs. Troops had to cross an open area varying in width from a few yards at each end to about 200 yards in the center, and then attack up the steep bluffs to the plateau where the Normandy American Cemetery now stands. The only concealment available was patches of tall marsh grass. Fighting was bitter and casualties [were] heavy. Nevertheless, the U.S 1st division took the high ground before D Day was over.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

OPERATION NEPTUNE NORMANDY

The 82nd Airborne Division arrived in the European Theater of Operations on 9 December, 1945, bronzed by the summer suns of North Africa and Sicily and bled and battle tested in campaigns in Sicily and the Italian mainland. One Regimental Combat team, the 504th, had been left behind when the division sailed from Naples, Italy on 19 November 1943.

The 504th Regimental Combat team, (consisting of the 504th Parachute Infantry, the 376th Parachute field, artillery battalion, and Company C, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion) was detached from the division and was fighting in the mountains North of the Volturno River, when the 82nd sailed from Naples. Later it was to spend more than 60 days of grueling warfare on the famous Anzio beachhead before rejoining the division in May in England.

The division disembarked at Belfast, Northern Ireland, and occupied an area northwest of that city. Division Headquarters was established at Castle Dawson, which was approximately thirty miles from Belfast. The Division was attached to XV Corps.

By 26 May 1944 all plans and preparations were completed, for the Division to carry out the mission. Assigned it by First United States Army. Field and administrative orders had been published and distributed. In a series of map maneuvers on a special 1/5,000 map regimental and battalion commanders had out-lined their plans in order that all commanders might be briefed thoroughly on the prospective Division operations. Divisional seaborne echelons already had departed for the marshalling yards and were assembled in camps scattered along the Welsh and English coasts, The Division mission was to be as follows;

Land by parachute and glider before and after dawn of D-Day west of **ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE**: seize, clear and secure the general area **ST. JACQUES DE NEHOU -- BESNEVILLE -- ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE -- BLANDAMOUR** and reorganize; seize and destroy the crossings of the **PRAIRIES MARECAGEUSES** north of **LA SANGSURIERE** at **ST. SAUVEUR DE PIERRE PONT**; destroy the crossings of the **OLLOMONDE** river in the vicinity of **ST. LO D'OURVILLE** and block crossroads vicinity **LE CHEMIN**; prevent enemy forces moving north between **ST. LO D'OURVILLE** and junction of **DOUVE** river with **PRAIRIE MARECAGEUSES**; and protect the south flank of VII corps north of the same line.

The mission, however, was changed by the First Army Commander on 26 May due to confirmed intelligence reports that the enemy had strengthened his forces on the **COTENTIN, (CHERBOURG)** peninsula with the addition of the 91st Infantry division in the general area of **ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE**.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

The revised mission of the 82nd Airborne division was to be:

Land by parachute and glider before and after dawn of D-Day astride the Merderet river, seize, clear and secure the general area **NEUVILLE AU PLAIN, BANDIENVILLE** within its zone; capture **ST. MERE EGLISE**; seize and secure the crossings of the **MERDERET** river and a bridgehead covering them, with main line of resistance along the general line. Seize and destroy the crossings of the **DOUVE** river at **BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE** and **ETIENVILLE** (also known as **PONT L'ABBE**): protect the northwest flank of VII corps within the Division zone, and be prepared to advance west on Corps order to the line of the **DOUVE** north of its junction with the **PRAIRIES MARECAGEUSES**.

New orders and other administrative details made necessary by the new mission were worked out quickly and disseminated within four days. The change did not affect the basic plan for movement in three echelons, which had been worked out as follows;

A shortage of adequate training facilities, the short days and long nights, and no facilities at all for airborne maneuvers, handicapped training. The need for such facilities and training became increasingly important, with the attachment to the division on 14 January 1944, of the 2nd Airborne Brigade, which included the Brigade Headquarters Company and the 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments, and preparations were made for the 82nd to move to the Nottingham - Leicester - Market Harboro area in the English Midlands. Brig. Gen. Maxwell B. Taylor, Division Artillery Commander, rejoined the Division after duty with the North African Theater of Operations.

The move to the midlands was made in mid-February 1944, and an extensive program of airborne and other types of training was begun. A parachute school was opened to train reinforcements, and a series of parachute problems was mapped out to begin with battalion drops and to culminate with a drop of three regiments. Glider personnel trained with the British Horsa gliders as well as with the CG-4A (Waco) gliders, took training rides of more than two hours duration.

Division Headquarters was established in a hatted camp in Braunstone Park, Leicester. The telephone code names of 'Leader' and 'Keystone', employed by the Division in forth Africa, Sicily and Italy, were dropped and the Division became known as "Champion". The 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, which had seen much of its personnel detached and left in Italy, was reorganized. The 2nd Battalion Glider Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, was attached to the 325th Glider Infantry. This move gave the 325th a total of three battalions. Brigadier General Taylor left the Division to become Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division. The Division was attached to VIII Corps.

Meanwhile, preparations were being made for the Division's participation in the invasion of the Normandy France, peninsula by Allied forces in 'Operation Neptune'. Brigadier General James M. Gavin the assistant Division Commander had preceded the Division on its move from Italy and had been a member of the Airborne planning- staff established by the Allies in London. The Division staff began preliminary planning work. in January and started intensive planning in February, when the Division. Situation room was opened at Camp Braunstone. The Division Commander, Major General Matthew B. Ridgway, was the senior American Airborne representative on an inter-Allied airborne planning committee.

"Y-Day", the day by which all plans were to be completed, had been set by Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, as 1 June. Regimental staffs were "'briefed' on Y-60 and battalion staffs or. Y-30 in accordance with instructions received from the First United States Army and VII Corps, to which the Division would be attached upon landing.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

AIR MOVEMENT TABLES

A/Borne unit	USTCC unit	No. A/C	Takeoff airfield	DZ	Time
82nd Pathfinders	1st PF	3	N. Witham	O	0121
82nd Pathfinders	1st PF	3	N. Witham	N	0138
82nd Pathfinders	1st PF	3	N. Witham	T	0202

MISSION "BOSTON" D-DAY

2 Bn 505 Prcht Inf	316 Gp	36	Cottesmore	O	0151
3 Bn 505 Prcht Inf	316 Gp	36	Cottesmore	O	0157
2 secs. 456 Prcht FA					
1 Bn 505 Prcht Inf	315 Gp	36			
HQ & HQ Co. 505		9	Spanhoe	O	0203
Plat 3-7 Abn Engr Bn	3				
Det. Hq 82 Abn Div					
2 Bn 508 Prcht Inf	314 Gp	36	Saltby	N	0208
Hq & Hq Co 508	314 Gr	9			
Co. B 307 Engr		6	Saltby	N	0214
Force 'A' Hq		9			
1 Bn 508. Prcht Inf	313 Gp	36	Folkingham	N	0220
3 Bn 508 Prcht Inf	313 Gp	36	Folkingham	N	0226
2 Bn 507 Prcht Inf	61 Gp	36	Barkston Heath	T	0231
3 Bn 507 Prcht Inf	61 Gp	36	Barkston Heath	T	0238
1 Bn 507 Prcht Inf	442 Gp	36	Fulbeck	T	0244
Hq & Hq Co. 507	442 Gp	9	Fulbeck	T	0244

Force "A" commanded by Brigadier General James M. Gavin, Assistant Division Commander, to be committed by parachute before dawn of D-Day and to include:

	Planes
Detachment Headquarter and Headquarter Co	4
82nd Airborne Division Pathfinders	9
Detachment Headquarter Division Artillery	2
Detachment 82nd Airborne Signal Corps	3
Detachment 456 Parachute Field Artillery Battalion (Attached 505 Parachute Infantry)	
Air Support Party (Attached Headquarter 82nd Airborne Division)	
505 Parachute Infantry	117
507 Parachute Infantry	117
508 Parachute Infantry	117
Company B, 307 Airborne Engineer Battalion	9
Naval Shore Fire Control Party (Attached 505 Parachute Infantry)	
TOTAL	378

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

Force "B" commanded by Major General Matthew B. Ridgway, Division Commander, to be committed by glider before and after dawn of D-Day and to include:

	Glanders
Headquarter and Headquarter Company	22
82nd Airborne Division Headquarter and Headquarter Battery	11
82nd Airborne Division Artillery	
82nd Airborne Signal Company	13
325 Glider Infantry	172
319 Glider Field Artillery Battalion	40
320 Glider Field Artillery Battalion	54
Batteries A, B and C, 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion	57
Company A, 307 Airborne Engineer Battalion	10
307 Airborne Medical Company	20
82nd Airborne	4
Command Vehicles - Parachute Regiments	12
TOTAL	428

Force "C" commanded by Brigadier General George P. Howell, Commanding General of 2nd Airborne Infantry Brigade, to be committed by sea, to land between June 8 and June 13 and to include:

- 456 Field Artillery Battalion
- 80th Airborne Anti Aircraft Battalion
- 307 Airborne Engineer Battalion
- 782 Airborne Ordnance Maintenance Company
- 407 Airborne Quarter Master Company
- 82nd Airborne Military Police Platoon
- Corps Medical Detachment
- 87th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
- 899 Tank Destroyer Battalion
- Troop B, 4 Cavalry Squadron
- Company C, 746 Tank Battalion (M)
- 3809 Quarter Master Truck Company
- 3810 Quarter Master Truck Company
- 1st Platoon, 603 Quarter Master Company

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

Seaborne Elements of Units in Forces "A" and "B"

Under the plan Force "A" in its entirety was to approach the Cherbourg Peninsula from the west and to drop between 0100 and 0315 hours on the night before D-Day on three-drop zones. The **505th Parachute Infantry Regiment** and its attachments were to land east of the Merderet River about 1,000 yards northwest of Ste. Mere Eglise. The **507th Parachute Infantry Regiment** was to land west of the Merderet River about 1,000 yards north to Amfreville. The **508th Parachute Infantry Regiment** and **Force "A" Headquarters** were to land west of the Merderet River about 1,000 yards north of Picauville.

Fifty-two gliders of **Force "B"** were to approach the Cherbourg Peninsula from the west prior to H-Hour and land on the 505th drop zone. The remainder of Force "B" was to approach the peninsula from the east and was to land late on D-Day and early on 7 June, on landing zones astride the Ste. Mere Eglise - Blosville Road. In a last minute change of plan General Ridgway parachuted with Force "A".

Aerial resupply missions were scheduled automatically for the morning of 7 June and on call thereafter if needed. The automatic mission was the only parachute mission ultimately flown but a small amount of equipment and supplies were received later by glider.

All airborne elements of the Division had closed and were sealed in special camps at the takeoff fields by twenty-four hours before the scheduled takeoff time. Parachute elements were located at seven airfields in the Grantham-Cottesmore-Langar area of the British Midlands, and glider elements were at seven airfields in the Aldermaston - Ramsbury - Merryfield area.

All men were briefed thoroughly on their missions, a re-check was made of all equipment and personnel, and planes and gliders were loaded with equipment. The Allied D-Day was postponed twenty-four hours because of weather conditions, and the first planes of Force "A" took off 5 June 1944.

The main flight was preceded by the three regimental pathfinder teams which dropped one-half hour prior to the first group. The pathfinders sustained many casualties and had difficulty in using lights, but they accomplished their mission and set up beacons to guide the incoming planes to the three designated drop zones.

The flight over the English Channel was in good formation and without incident, but between the west coast and the drop zones a heavy fog bank tended to break up the formation of the planes. Flak and some enemy night fighters activity caused some of the troop carrier planes to take up evasive action, and by the time the drop zones were reached many planes were scattered, and were flying at excessive speeds and at altitudes higher than those ideal for jumping.

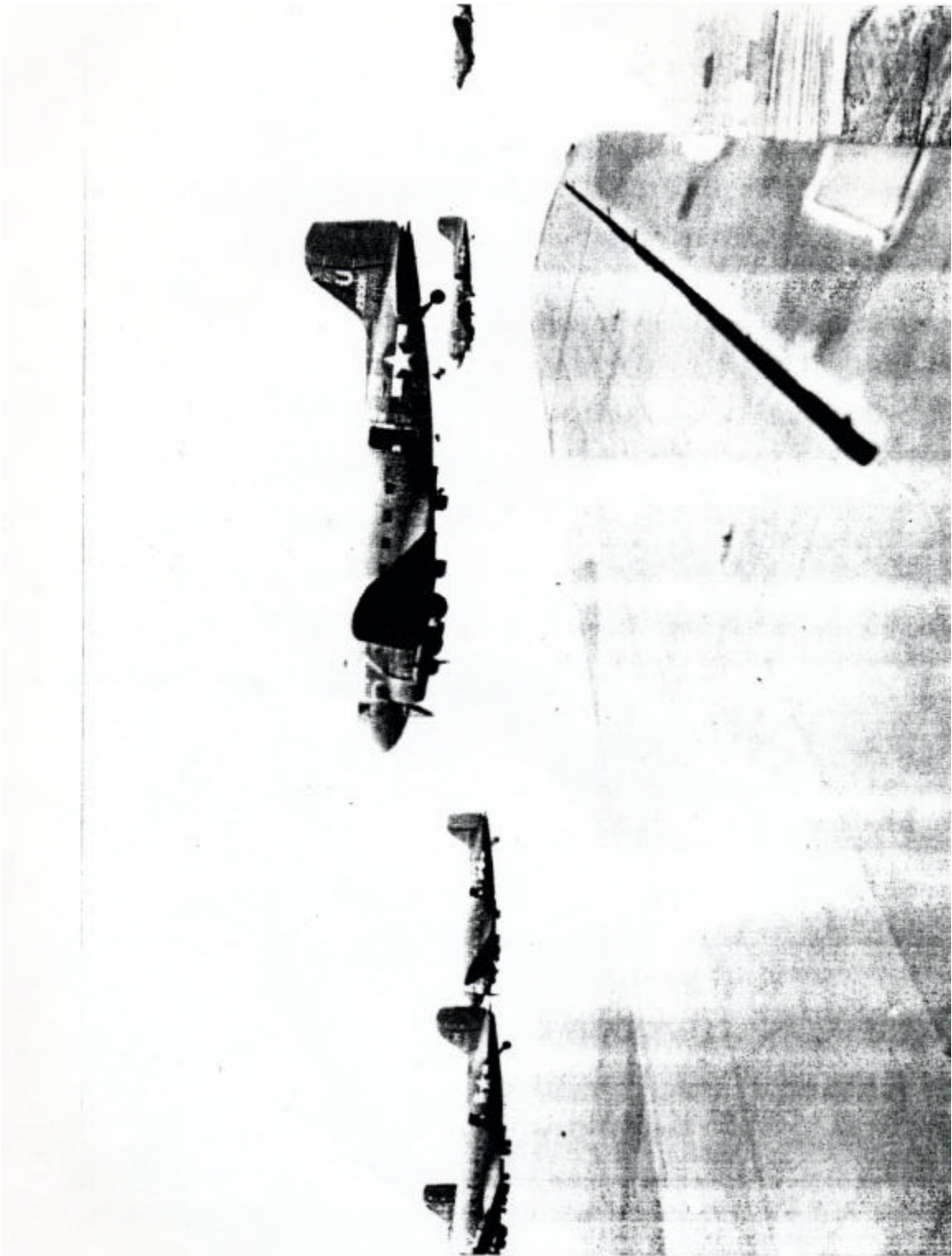
The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment landed generally in the vicinity of its drop zone. The 507th Parachute Infantry was scattered, one element dropping in the vicinity of Montebourg, another south of Carentan and the remainder astride the Merderet River east of the drop zone.

The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment was likewise scattered widely, the bulk of its parachutists dropping east of the drop zone and some personnel landing so far away as nine kilometers south of Cherbourg.

The fifty-two gliders containing batteries of the 80th Airborne Anti-aircraft Battalion and detachments and forward parties of Artillery, Signal and Division Headquarters groups followed the main body of paratroopers and began landing at 0404 hours. The gliders also encountered fog and flak. They too were scattered, and many of them were damaged upon crashing into the small fields and high hedgerows.

Enemy reaction to the landing of the 82nd Airborne Division in the Normandy area was prompt and severe, but from the time the first member landed until thirty-three days later, when the Division was finally relieved, every mission was accomplished and no ground gained was ever relinquished.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS



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SUMMARY

82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION

The first element of the main body of the Division jumped at 0151 hours, having been preceded thirty minutes by the Pathfinder teams. By 0312 hours all paratroopers had landed, and at 0404 hours the first of fifty-two gliders in the initial glider serial crash landed. Both parachutists and gliders were scattered.

Small groups and some units attacked to secure the Division zone. Groups of men and individuals who had been scattered in the landings rejoined their units throughout the day and by nightfall approximately thirty percent of the Division's forces were under control.

At 2100 hours one hundred gliders landed with artillery, engineers, and special troops. Seaborne elements set sail at 0645 from Bristol except for a task force consisting of Company C, 746th Tank Battalion; the 1st Platoon, Troop B, 4th Cavalry Squadron; and elements of Company F, 3rd Battalion (originally 2nd Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry), 325th Glider Infantry. This task force landed on Utah Red Beach at 1400 hours and proceeded inland with the mission of contacting the Division near Ste. Mere Eglise.

At the close of the day, the Division was in the midst of severe fighting. It had captured Ste. Mere Eglise and held a general line along the Merderet River from La Fiere south to include the eastern end of the causeway over the Merderet River.