

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

FOLKINGHAM - SUNDAY 28 MAY 1944

The third battalion of the 508th boarded the "buses, with full combat equipment and were driven to the airfield at Folkingham, England. It was just a short ride to the hangars and when the buses stopped we assembled and -arched inside, where we were assigned an army cot.

I put: my rifle and combat gear beneath the cot and laid down, closing my eyes. I thought to myself, 'this is it, just a matter of time and I will be in combat. Wonder what my folks are doing at home? Are they thinking about the invasion? What would they think if they knew at this moment we were preparing ourselves for the invasion?'

"Chow time!" Those words interrupted my thoughts. The men seemed to be taking their time lining up. It was by contrast a strange sight to see, for I remember when at base camp there was always a race to be first in line.

To me, it appeared that the troopers were in no hurry.

As D-Day approached, the tension was increasing. The date had not been set and the men were making guesses as to when the jump was to take place. Then the time came when we were briefed for the mission.

After the briefing our company officers had informed us that we were to be a part of the greatest invasion the world had ever known. The Airborne troops were given the mission to stop the Germans from reinforcing their troops on the beaches. We were ordered to hold and fight at all costs, while giving the American landing forces time to establish a strong beachhead.

If the Airborne troops failed in their mission, it could be a disastrous defeat for the Allied forces.

WEDNESDAY 31 MAY 1944

"Fall out, let's go -- on the double'. With complete gear !"

This was going to be a dry run for the real thing. I was wearing my trousers with the large patch pockets. My jump jacket was worn over a woolen undershirt. Next I put on the combat belt and suspenders. Attached to the belt was a shovel, a canteen filled with water, first aid pack, compass and bayonet. For safety I taped the handles of the grenades and put one each into both lower pockets of the jacket, and in the leg pockets of the pants. I put my chocolate bars in the upper jacket pockets and a gas mask was strapped to my left leg. Below the gas mask I fastened a leather holster, which contained a .32 Belgian pistol. A trench knife was securely strapped to my right boot.

My rifle sling was fully extended and it hung across my chest on an angle. Three bandoliers of ammo were slung across my chest to the left side. On top of this went the main parachute. I adjusted the leg straps to fit as tightly as possible and then snapped the chest strap. My reserve chute was secured to the main harness.

Below the reserve hung a musette bag, filled with three K-ration meals, a wool cap, underwear; toilet articles, vitamin pills, socks and other things we thought were important. Just below the musette bag hung a ten-pound land mine.

Fastening all this equipment together with a belt and attaching it to the right side of the main chute proved the most difficult procedure of all. The belt must be passed through the rear of the reserve chute and attached to the left side. Then all must be adjusted so that a quick tug will release the belt. The

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

chinstrap of the helmet was made to fit tightly, because the initial shock of the parachute opening could push your helmet forward, causing facial injuries.

Wearing my complete combat equipment, including the parachute, I walked over to platoon leader Sergeant Bundy to have him inspect my equipment. (Actually, we all waddled like ducks.)

I made some minor adjustments to increase my ability to move. I estimated that my total weight was about three hundred pounds. Sergeant Bundy looked me over and said, "Okay, that's the way it will be when I give the order to go".

We were told to remove our gear and keep it all together for we would move at a minute's notice.

I was worried about the leg straps. They fit very high around the top of the thighs and needed to be fastened tightly. I was concerned about removing them quickly so decided to cut them after I had landed.

Out came the oilstone and I began to resharpen my trench knife. When I finished the blade was razor sharp. I then tied a leather thong around the handle, forming a loop large enough to slip my hand through.

I was laying on the cot with all sorts of thoughts tumbling through my mind, while waiting for the order to go. The tension was building up inside all of us. There was an uneasy silence throughout the hangar.

A trooper named Harold Wilbur came and sat next to me on the cot. He asked me how I felt about going into combat. I told him I was nervous. He wanted to know if I thought I would survive and I replied, "I don't know." Harold told me that he had a feeling he would be killed in the jump. His prediction came true. Although I have no verification, I believe he died in the initial jump.

I knew the time would soon be upon us when we would receive the orders to put on the equipment and board the planes. So many thoughts were in my mind. "Did I have enough training for combat? How would I react under enemy fire? Would I be too frightened to carry out orders? Would I still do the job I had been trained for? On and on and on the thoughts went.

"Kill or be killed. What a horrible thought! How would I feel if I killed a man? The Ten Commandments state, "Thou shalt not kill".

Suddenly there was a burst of machinegun fire and we scattered in all directions. I hit the floor and the ensuing silence made me realize that a burst of gunfire had hit the ceiling of the hangar. The officers raised hell about a sub-Thomson going off. They gave us orders NOT to put ammo in the chambers of our weapons, but to load them after we had landed. We got an idea of combat, right there in the hangar.

I could hear the sounds of the C47 engines and knew they were being placed in formation for our departure.

MONDAY 5 JUNE 1944

"Let's go, put on your equipment." The sergeants were shouting to their men: "This is it."

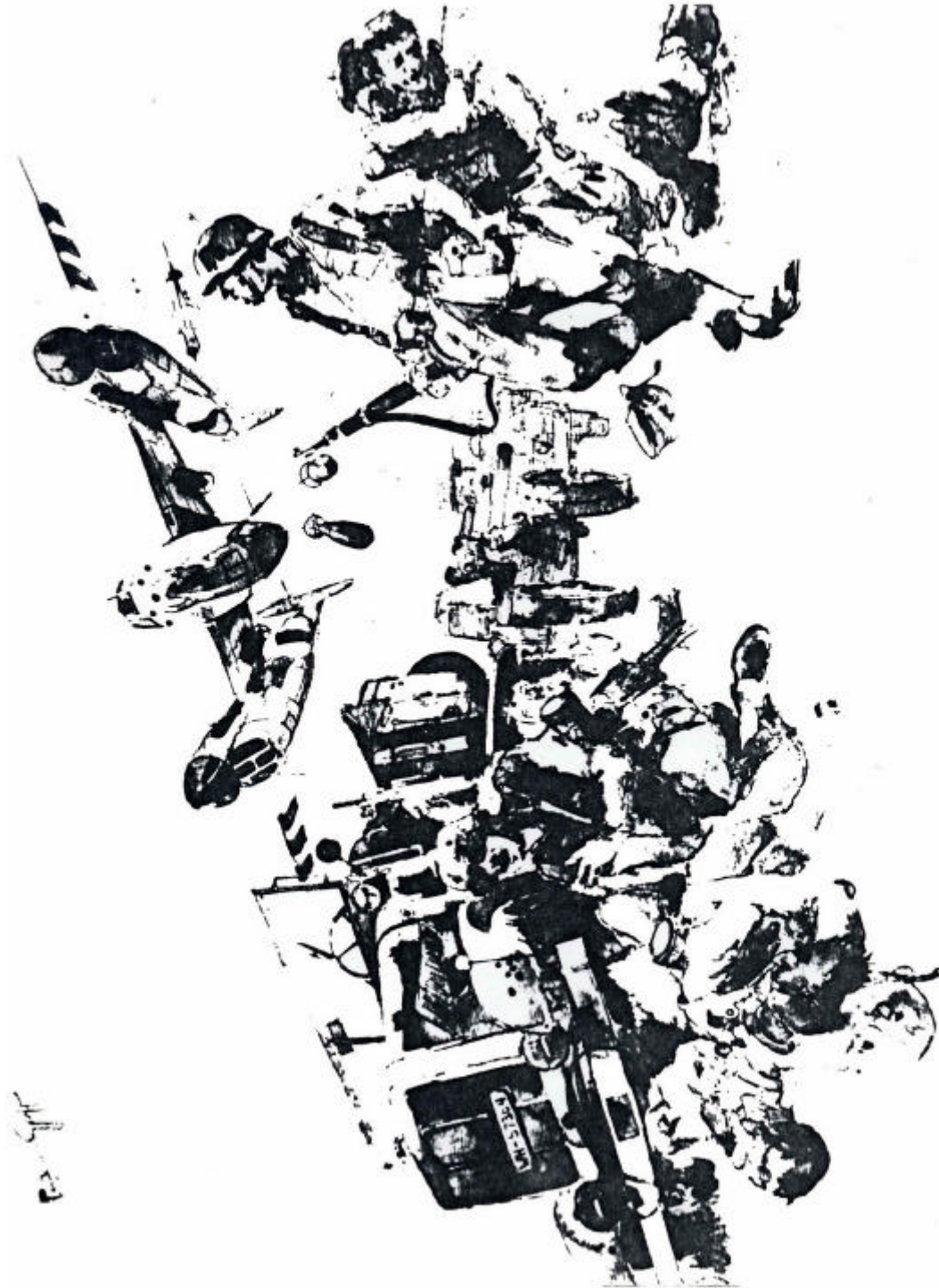
For a brief moment there was silence throughout the hangar. Then all at once there was a tremendous roar of voices.

"Geronimol"

"Give 'em hell'."

"Let's GO'."

JUMP INTO DARKNESS



THE U.S. AIR FORCE CONDUCTED STRATEGIC AIR BOMBARDMENT INTO ENEMY TERRITORY, MARCH 1944

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

The morale of the men was high and they were ready to take on the Germans. The noise and the shouting was deafening. The hangar was a beehive of activity as the men were putting on their equipment. You could hear shouts of "Hey, give me a hand", "Who's got my rifle?" "Where is Sergeant Bundy?" "Help me get this damn chute on," and "I can't fasten my leg straps'." Some were helping others who were having a hard time, while others were starting to line up according to their squad. When all were ready and in formation, it became silent again. All you could hear were the officers and non-coms giving orders to their squads.

Fully equipped, we marched at a slow pace towards our planes. It was getting dark and the men were silent as they neared the C47. Finally shouts and laughter could be heard as the fully equipped troopers tried to climb the steps to enter the plane. It was a difficult task and required each other's help. I was first in and therefore would be the last to leave the aircraft. After we were seated the crew sergeant checked the static line wire, which extended the length of the plane. He also reminded us to have the static line hook in our left hand.

The Air Force Crew Sergeant did his best to make conversation. It was obvious that he was trying to put us at ease. The sergeant asked, "Where are you troopers from?" Most of us replied with the name of our home state. He insisted that Kentucky was the best state in the Union. The troopers gave him hell'. We all laughed - he had succeeded in breaking the tension. One trooper asked the sergeant if it was true that he had orders to shoot any man who refused to jump. He replied quietly, "That's the order I've been given." His soft answer brought on a terrible silence.

The Crew Sergeant looked out of the door as then engines of the C47's were warming up. He was watching the long formation on the run- way. Our plane began to move and before long we also were in formation. We could feel the vibrations as the engines strained at full r.p.m.'s moving down the runway. In a few minutes we were airborne. When in group formation, we would be on our way to France.

"It will be some time before we reach our drop zone, so relax if you can. I'm sorry you're not allowed to smoke in the plane." The plane was in darkness and we were alone with our thoughts. The crew sergeant went to the front of the plane and spoke to the pilot.

"What the hell is that noise?" someone asked.

The sergeant told us we were flying near the Islands of Jersey and Guernsey, and we were being greeted by anti-aircraft fire from the Germans. We could hear the shells bursting outside the planes and see the tracers from machineguns in the distance. We were fortunate that our plane was not hit by the shrapnel or bullets.

No one in the plane spoke. I could feel a chill come over me. I felt like a sitting duck and wished we were at our drop zone.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

D-DAY

"Stand up and hook up!" The silence was broken and we jumped up and snapped our hooks on to the wire. Then the sergeant called, "Keep your hand on the D-ring when you leave the plane."

"Sound off for equipment check." I shouted "17 O.K." The next man shouted "16 O.K." The countdown continued until "1 O.K."

"Stand in the door." My heart was pounding and I said a prayer to myself. I shouted, "What time is it?" It was 2:30, although I don't know who answered. I don't know why I asked for the time, but I suppose it relieved the tension. I felt I was all alone, and continued praying.

The first man held his position in the doorway and we all shuffled up tightly and kept the pressure on him until we heard, "Are you ready?" All together we yelled, "Yeah".

"Let's go'." With the roar of the engines in my ears, I was out the door and into the silence of the night. I realized I had made the "*JUMP INTO DARKNESS*".

As the chute popped open my head snapped forward and my feet came up; my helmet was pushed slightly over my face. The jolt of the opening chute soon made everything a reality. I looked up at my chute to make sure it was O.K., then looked down and couldn't see anything but blackness. I unfastened the main belt, unsnapped my reserve and let it drop to the ground. I opened the chest strap. Now all I had to do on the ground was remove the leg straps and I would be free of the parachute.

For a few seconds on the way down, I looked around and saw red and green flares. The brightness of tracers flying into the sky and the sound of machineguns firing seemed to be all around me. I thought, "... just like the Fourth of July."

Looking up at the chute, and then down at my feet, I had the shock of my life. I plunged into water. My heart was pounding and my thoughts were running a mile a minute. "How deep is the water? Can I get free of my chute? Am I too heavy? Will the weight keep me on the bottom?"

I hit the water in a standing position, and when my feet touched the bottom I was leaning slightly forward. I straightened and kicked up for air. The water was not as deep as I had expected so I held my breath and tried to stand. The water was just above my nose! Quickly I stood on my toes and gasped for another breath of air. My heart was beating so rapidly that I thought it would burst. I pleaded, "Oh God, please, don't let me drown."

Below the water I went and tried to remove the leg straps. They were too tight and wouldn't unsnap. Needing more air I jumped up, and as soon as my head was above water, I began splashing around. I started to pray, standing on my toes, with my head barely above water, my heart beating faster. After a few seconds I calmed down and decided to cut the straps. "God, my only chance is the knife. Please let it be there,"

Going down into the water again, I felt for my right boot. "Yes, yes, it's still here." I slipped my hand through the loop and tightly gripped the handle. With a fast upward motion I removed the knife from the sheath. Quickly I jumped up for more air and stood still for a while, thinking, "now I have a chance". Holding the knife tighter as I went below the water, I slipped it between my leg and the strap, working back and forth in an upward motion. Nothing happened!

In a panic I came up for another breath of air and thought my heart would burst from fright. I wanted to scream for help but knew that could make matters worse. I told myself I must think. Think why can't I cut the strap? My knife is razor sharp'. As I was gasping for air I kept saying Hail Mary's. It

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

seemed an eternity before I realized I had the blade upside down. "That's it'. I'm using the back of the blade'." I touched the sharp edge and made sure it was in the upright position.

Taking another gulp of air, I went down again to cut the leg straps. With a few pulls of the knife on each strap I was finally free of the chute.

Getting rid of the chute calmed me a little, but the weight of the musette bag and land mine was still holding me down. With a few rapid strokes of the knife I cut loose the land mine. Then I unfastened the straps of the musette bag and let it fall.

I adjusted the rifle and bandoleers of ammo into a more comfortable position. Then I cut away the gas mask and removed the hand grenades from my leg pockets, and put them into the lower jacket pockets. Reaching up I unfastened the chinstrap of the helmet and let it fall into the water. After taking another deep breath I bent down to retrieve the musette bag. Except for the wool cap, the entire contents were disposed of, and the bag was then thrown over my head to hang behind me.

I became conscious of the rifle and machinegun fire in the distance and I was gripped by fear. All the training I had received had not prepared me for a landing like this - in water!! The equipment I still carried was heavy, and I was terrified I would drown because of it. I hesitated to move for fear of walking into deeper water. I needed to find a spot where the water was a little lower though, so I could get off my toes and rest.

Moving slowly, inch by inch, the water became shallower. When it was chest high I stopped and rested, trying to decide which way to go. My eyes strained to see a landmark but I could see nothing in the darkness. I was cold and began to shiver.

We had been told at the briefing to go in the direction of the next plane coming in, if we were separated from the squad. "Suppose there are no more planes - then what should I do?" The water seemed to be getting colder now. My shivering got worse and my teeth were chattering. "I must keep moving; then I won't feel the cold so much."

The water was now at waist level and I believed I was walking towards high ground. I kept moving but the water then became deeper. I turned and returned to the waist-high water.

In the distance to my left I could hear the sound of airplane engines coming in my direction, and getting louder. All hell broke loose as rifles and machineguns began firing and I watched the tracers flying into the air. Suddenly there was a huge burst of orange flames coming from both engines. As the plane came down it sounded like the scream of a human being about to die. I could not believe what was happening. I just stood still, seeing, hearing. Suddenly I realized the plane was heading straight for me, in a ball of flames and screeching for help.

As fast as I could I moved to the right, trying to get out of its path. "Oh my God, it's banking towards me." In a panic I tried to run the other way. The flames lit up the darkness, and with screaming engines, the plane crashed. It was dark again and became very quiet.

As I stood shaking in the cold water I wondered if the troopers had bailed out before the crash. "I'll head in that direction and maybe I'll join up with some of them. I have to get out of this water before daylight -- if I'm spotted by the Germans they'll use me for target practice."

I was still shoulder high in the water and was pushing my way through some weeds. "No, it couldn't be. Did I hear a voice?" Pushing the weeds away as I walked, I heard the password, "**FLASH**". I recognized the voice to be Dale Cable's. Pushing the weeds from side to side, my right arm hit against a hard object and I heard the click of a trigger. Cable hollered "**FLASH**" again, while he cocked the bolt of his weapon and put a round in the chamber. Immediately I replied, "**THUNDER.**" He recognized my voice and proceeded to give me hell for not answering the first time. His rifle was a few inches from my face.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

Meeting Tommy Home made us feel better and the three of us proceeded toward the plane. While walking through the tall weeds we again heard the password and replied. This time we found Tom Lott, and asked him if he thought there was anyone else in the water. He said he hadn't heard any other movement except ours. Time was running out. Hoping to join up with other troopers, we moved as fast as we could. We knew it was imperative that we leave the water before daylight.

We were moving along in single file but with some space between us. I heard splashing. Tom Lott was making noise as though he were going under. Home and I rushed over and pulled him above water. We couldn't understand what had happened until Tom told us he could not swim. We decided to keep a tight single file, and we put Tom Lott between Dale Cable and myself. Tom Home led. Cable told Lott to hold onto his rifle barrel and to stay as close to him as possible.

Daylight was coming upon us fast and we could now see the outline of trees. We all knew what would happen if we failed to reach land before daylight. In our haste to reach high ground, Tommy Lott let go of Cable's rifle and went slightly to our right, falling below the water. This time I thought we had lost him for sure. Rushing over, I grabbed him and kept his head above water. He was coughing loudly, so we rested for a few seconds. We all told him again and again to stay close! Now we could see land clearly and Home was moving us faster. Just as we reached the bank he went under, but managed to struggle to his feet again. Lott was afraid to move so I pulled him by the hand while Cable pushed from behind. We finally got him onto high ground.

The four of us collapsed on the bank, completely exhausted. It was almost daylight when we took cover in the hedgerows. The hours spent in the cold water left us shivering. Water was dripping from our uniforms and sloshed in our boots. I made a clearing in the brush and removed my combat belt and bandoliers of ammo. I shook the water from my M1 and removed the clip of ammo, then looked down the barrel to see if it was clogged. It appeared to be clean so I replaced the ammo, then sat down.

While removing my boots and socks, I noticed that my pistol and holster were gone. After squeezing the water from my socks I put them back on and laced up my boots. I took off my combat jacket and wool undershirt. Wringing the water from these was difficult but I did the best I could with both. After putting on the damp undershirt, it gave me the shivers and my teeth began to chatter. Reaching for my musette bag, I took out the wool cap, gave it a few squeezes to remove the water and put it on my head.

My knife was still hanging from my wrist. Before putting it into the sheath, I gave it a little kiss. If it weren't for that knife I'd still be in the swamp, struggling. Or drowned.

Zipping up my combat jacket, I slung the ammo over my shoulder and sat down beside a tree. Resting my back against the trunk, I reached into my pocket for a chocolate bar, had a few bites, then put it back into my pocket.

My teeth were chattering and I was shivering from the cold. I prayed that God would be good to us and make the sun shine. My prayers were answered. In the bright sunlight, we slept for a little while.

Tom Home suggested that we move out and try to contact some of the other men from our regiment. Lott and Cable agreed, so we ran across the field to a hedgerow, spotting a road. Looking to the left we saw a few troopers walking down the road towards us. We jumped over the hedgerow with our guns leveled at them. They gave us hell for keeping them covered, but after speaking to them for a few minutes we were convinced they were Americans.

They told us we took a hell of a beating on the initial jump, losing many men in the high water of the swamps along with most of our gliders. The situation looked very discouraging at the time. We asked about the 508 men and if they had met any down the road. They told us the men they had met were from different regiments. These troopers were from the 507th and were trying to find their own regiment. Wishing each other good luck, we went our separate ways.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

We continued down the road, running short distances at a time and taking cover in ditches. Further down the road we heard more voices and stopped, took cover in the ditch and listened. We recognized the American voices and came out with our rifles in a hip firing position, while advancing toward the troopers.

We were standing outside a small building and after identifying each other we asked what was going on. They told us there were many wounded inside, so we entered and spoke to some of them. None of the G.I.'s being taken care of by the medics were from our company.

After leaving the building we went further down the road and came upon a glider that had crashed. Immediately we went to see if there were any wounded inside. To our surprise there was a medic attending the wounded in there. Except for one, all the glider men had died in the crash. His leg was crushed and the medic was about to remove it. Those glider men didn't have much of a chance. I hadn't seen a glider that wasn't badly damaged or which hadn't crashed. Paratroopers have a great admiration and respect for the glider men. They had it a lot tougher than us.

Home, Cable, Lott and I were still together at this point. There was some shooting down the road and we could hear more voices. Cautiously we ran down the road and met a few more troopers. They had some Germans pinned down and Jack Schlegel was trying to talk them into giving up. Jack was doing a lot of shouting in German, and then waiting for a reply. When he received no answer, he gave a burst from his machinegun. After that a few Germans gave up to him.

Right after they surrendered we received mortar and rifle fire and scattered for the hedgerows to take cover. That was the last time I was to see Tom Home, Dale Cable or Tom Lott.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

WEDNESDAY 7 JUNE 1944

While in the hedgerow I joined another group of troopers, one of whom was Cannonball, our cook in England. It gave me a good feeling to be with someone I knew, having been separated from my friends.

In single file we moved along a hedgerow, which was parallel to a road. The column stopped when we received word that a vehicle was traveling on the road toward us. It was a German motorcyclist. Cannonball said he was going to shoot the rider. Taking careful aim, he waited until the cyclist was about fifty feet away and fired a single shot.

The German seemed suspended in midair, while the motorcycle continued to go. It crashed into the side of the road. The German soldier lay in the middle of the road, with his arms outstretched. This was the first dead German soldier I had seen. He looked young, about twenty years of age, with blonde hair.

We stayed in our position and waited to see if there were any more Germans on the way. A few minutes passed before they gave the "all clear" - "move on". We ran in leaps and bounds, keeping an eye on the road.

After running a short distance, the column stopped again. "Why are we stopping?" I asked. "There is a road up ahead" came the reply. As soon as the first man crosses the road we'll move forward.

A trooper started his run, he reached the middle of the road, a shot was fired and the trooper fell face down, arms outstretched, as if reaching for the other side.

Immediately, there was an exchange of machinegun and rifle fire. The hand signal was given to keep going. We were all moving very rapidly, leaving the trooper where he fell - all alone.

With all the uncertainty of not knowing where we were going, fear began to grip us. We began to bunch up in small groups. "Don't bunch up" a voice shouted - "keep a distance of 15 feet between you and keep your eyes on the man in front of you". "Keep moving".

While the daylight was disappearing the orders were given to dig in for the night, one man sleeps, the other stays awake. No smoking, stay in close contact with each other. We move at the crack of daylight. "Hopefully we shall contact Regimental Headquarters".

I was shivering from the cold night air; my thoughts were of a G.I blanket and a hot cup of coffee. How did I get into this predicament? My teeth would not stop chattering as I continued thinking of England, the mess hall, food, hot coffee and a warm stove. It was not possible to sleep, the night became colder and colder

When daylight arrived, we welcomed it, for now we could start moving and warm up. Some one shouted "Move out!", and silently we followed the man in front, wondering where we were going.

More troopers joined our group and we were organized into squads, then given a position to defend near the road. We were placed in a defensive fighting position and told to keep alert.

We had no officers, just non-coms, who knew and did their job well in setting up a perimeter. My position was in a corner of a field and just across from me was Sergeant Busson, who set up his mortar position.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

HILL 30

About midday a fierce battle began. Sergeant Kohanic opened fire with his 50-caliber machinegun and Sergeant Busson with his 60mm mortar. Sergeant Kohanic stopped a tank, which was from World War I. The battle raged until late afternoon when Sergeant Busson shouted, "That's the last of the mortar shells, let's get the hell out of here!" We left the position and ran up another hedgerow.

We were unable to open a gate with a padlock on it, so we blasted it off with a burst of bullets from a sub-Thomson and ran into the field along the hedgerow. We took up new positions and before long, made contact with Colonel Shanley. He gave us new positions and there we waited for another German attack. Sergeant Busson asked for volunteers to go and look for the wounded. About eight of us volunteered to go back to the fields and bring them in. We entered the first field and saw two troopers lying on the ground. One of them had his head completely blown apart and was unrecognizable. From his nametag we learned he was R. W, Benson, (H) Company. A few feet from him lay another trooper whose body was badly mangled. One leg was mutilated and the other leg was under his body. I thought he was dead, but as I began to move the leg that was under him, he let out a cry of pain. We handled him carefully and put him on a stretcher.

We were so weak from lack of food that it took eight of us to carry one wounded soldier. We took him to a ditch where all the other wounded were assembled. They were placed at various intervals along the hedgerows, and we did the best we could for them. We covered them with parachutes to keep them warm and made pillows from the chutes. We had found a pen that belonged to Sergeant Williams, but not a sign of him. We assumed he had been taken prisoner.

Walking along the hedgerow with another trooper, where the wounded were laying, a voice called, "Hey, trooper, come here." As I walked towards him I asked him how he felt. He wanted to know how badly he was hit. Looking down at him, I saw that all the flesh was blown away from the right side of his face. He started crying and reached for his face with a hand that was black with dirt. Quickly I grabbed his wrist and told him not to touch his face, that he would be all right. He asked me for a cigarette and a drink of water.

In the same area there were many dead Germans. One had been attempting to go through a hedgerow and was shot before he got through. Below him on the road were two more Germans, lying on their backs. One held his hands together, as if begging for his life. The other died with a sneer on his face, and, like the first, with his eyes open.

The troopers were most concerned about the soldiers who were wounded and needed medical attention. The best we could do though was to dress their wounds with a gauze pad and sulfur powder, and try to keep them warm.

Lieutenant Millsap led the troopers in an attempt to cross the river and inform our regimental commander of the situation. Many troopers lost their lives in this attempt, but did however, succeed in making contact with the main forces and asked for immediate artillery fire to break up the impending attack against us. He also informed them that we had many wounded in the trenches, and if we failed to repel the German attack, our small group would be annihilated and all our wounded would surely die.

Many of the wounded said they would die fighting, rather than surrender.

The troopers stayed in their position and prayed that relief would soon arrive. Before noon, artillery began falling in the next hedgerow. We were bewildered, because we were unable to decide whose artillery it was. Were the Germans shelling us and falling short, or were the Americans firing on target? Luck was

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

on our side; it was our artillery firing with deadly accuracy. The shells exploded all around our position, and the German attack never came.

Soon darkness fell and quiet surrounded us. The Germans were two hedgerows away and during the night I heard them speaking, and a dragging sound. The next day I discovered it was small artillery on wagons, which they were planning to use on their counter attack.

Since D-Day the only food I had eaten was a few chocolate bars, and I began to feel weak from hunger. We searched constantly for food or for anyone who could give us something to eat. Some of the French people shunned us, but we were to find out later that they were under the threat of death if they were caught aiding us in any way.

Looking out my foxhole one morning I saw a trooper carrying a huge piece of meat. I asked him if the main part of the regiment had broken through and brought supplies.

"Hell, no. One of the troopers shot a cow, and everyone is cutting up slabs of beef. You want some?" Of course I did, and he cut off a portion.

I put it in my canteen cup with some water and boiled it. A residue formed on top of the water, which looked and smelled too horrible to eat. I threw it away and still was hungry.

SATURDAY 10 JUNE 1944

The main force of the 508th came through and it was a welcome sight after so many days of isolation. Our troops who had made it over the bridge returned with them, some carrying milk cans filled with hot food.

The food was a welcome sight. I quickly filled up a canteen with hot stew. I ate a few spoonfuls but to my surprise, I wasn't able to eat very much. The little I did [eat] made me vomit. We had eaten nothing for so many days. After a while I sipped on some coffee and managed to keep it down. I learned to eat a little at a time, very slowly.

We heard shouts of, "Anybody here from (G) Company? (H), or (I) Company?" The group I was with consisted of all companies and different regiments.

"Men of the 508th, 1st Battalion, assemble here. 2nd Battalion, over there, and men of the 3rd, stay where you are." That was the first sign of organization I had heard since I had jumped into Normandy.

I was finally reunited with the men of (H) Company. Those of us who met shook hands, hugged each other and shed a few tears. We all asked each other what had happened since we jumped. I was told that Sergeant Bundy had drowned in the water. Corporal Latimer parachuted through an old roof, and when they found him his body had been badly mutilated, with parts cut off and put into his mouth. They told me that many of (H) Company troopers had drowned in the swamps, due to the deep water and the weight they were carrying. Some drowned simply because they had a fear of water, or could not swim.

What was left of the 508th was well organized and before long we were issued ammo, hand grenades, rifles and food rations. Just about everything that was needed to get us in pursuit of the Germans.

After three days of fighting for the bridge, there were many bodies lying there, both German and American. I was told that the tanks ran over them to reach our position.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

SUNDAY 11 JUNE 1944

Le Port Filiolet

Word reached me that a lady was cooking pancakes for the paratroopers. About mid-afternoon I located the farmhouse. There were a few troopers both inside and out. It seemed strange to me that we were lined up as if we were on the chow line.

Entering the house, I looked around the kitchen and saw a lady standing, her back toward me. She never turned around. She kept saying things in French while passing out the pancakes. It occurred to me that she didn't want us to see her face. As I reached her she handed one pancake to me. Thanking her, I motioned for another. Tears were in her eyes as she told me in French, "It's impossible, too many paratroopers and not enough food." Thanking her again, I left, but the look on her face and her tear-filled eyes have remained with me.

An act of kindness and compassion is something one never forgets, considering all the death and destruction we had seen in a few days. Anyone who stood on that line remembers her standing there, giving away those pancakes.

When I left the farmhouse and returned to my foxhole, I met other troopers and spoke to them about the lady with the food. We motioned in the direction of the house, and as they were leaving one trooper turned to me and said, "Hey, what's the lady's name?" Not knowing, I shouted, "Madame Crepe Suzette."

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

THE MONEY

“Hey, trooper, may I borrow your musette bag?” I looked up at him questioningly. “Why do you want to borrow my bag?” I asked. Excitedly he explained - “Let me have it - there’s a German vehicle that’s been blown to pieces, and there is money all over the road. It was a German payroll truck, and I want to get my share of the money”, he replied.

“You are crazy” I said to him. “Do you want to get yourself shot! You’ll live longer if you stay here! “It may be my chance of becoming a rich man*” he answered.

“O.K. you can have the musette bag, but I want it returned to me when you come back”. He snatched the bag from the ground and began running in the direction of the road.

I kept looking at him as he disappeared over the hedgerow. Maybe he is right in his thinking, he may become a rich man, I thought smiling to myself.

I had just finished making coffee for myself when the trooper returned with my bag, bulging with the money that he went for.

“You can have half of the money” he said, handing the bag to me, which was stuffed with foreign money. Reaching inside, I pulled out a handful of French money - neatly strapped in bundles about half an inch thick.

“I doubt if this money is of any value,” I said with a frown on my face. “What am I going to do with it?” I said in an angry voice.

He quickly replied, “Buy things from the French people - we are supposed to pay for anything we want from them.” I thought he had gone mad.

Taking his share of the French money, he thanked me for the use of the bag and walked away - leaving me with a musette bag, half filled with French francs.

At the first opportunity I showed the money to my platoon leader. "Is this money any good, sir? - Can I exchange it for American money when we get back to England?" The lieutenant looked in the bag, handled some of the money, and said “I don’t believe this can be exchanged for U.S currency - I doubt it very much.”

Later, while walking on a road towards a farmhouse, I met a Frenchman. I stopped and asked him for some milk. He wanted me to follow him to the farmhouse, but I decided to wait for him where I was. He said something in French and walked towards the farmhouse. A while later he returned with two wine bottles filled with milk. When he gave them to me I thanked him and handed him a packet of francs. He spoke again and I understood that he wanted more money - so I handed him a few more bundles. His voice got louder and he became very excited, so I gave him even more money. He wanted to refuse it - but I insisted that he keep it all. I will always remember him walking towards the farmhouse with one hand filled with money, talking to himself.

After all the difficulty I had in trying to give the money to the Frenchman for the milk, and him trying to return it to me - now I was convinced that the money was of no value.

The Francs became useful for many things. I used it to start fires when I made coffee and for toilet paper in the field. I also rolled cigarettes with the bills then lit them with it. So you see, the money did become valuable in many ways.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

The money was kept in my musette bag until the time I was at Utah Beach, boarding the boat for England. Once I was on the boat I soon realized there was no place for me to sleep. All the bunks were occupied, so I slept on the floor near the bunks.

A sailor woke me and said I could use his bunk while he goes on watch above deck. "Okay - thank you" I said.

I fell fast asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. The sailor soon returned, however, and I had to go back to the floor. This went on a few times as we crossed the Channel to England

To show my appreciation I gave the sailor all the remaining French francs I had, for allowing me to use his bunk. As he thanked me, he said "We don't have the opportunity to get any souvenirs - unless the soldiers give them to us."

It was about the second week in our camp at Wollaton Park in Nottingham, England, when I heard the voice of the same lieutenant I had spoken to in Normandy about the money. He was calling "Turn in all foreign money if you want to exchange it for English or American money to send home".

I quickly ran to the officer and, standing in front of him I said, "You told me the French money I had was of no value". He looked at me and smilingly said "The orders just came through today - to exchange all currency - regardless of where you got it".

As I looked at him - speechless - I could feel the tears come to my eyes.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

14 JUNE 1944

HOTOT

The 3rd Battalion had a strong defensive position in the vicinity of Hotot. Company H was deployed in a field with high weeds, which gave excellent concealment.

The German attack failed when their determined efforts were unable to dislodge the 3rd Battalion or force them from their line of defense. The price for their determination was paid in casualties.

Our mortar squads were exploding their shells on the German position with deadly accuracy. After 15 minutes of this murderous bombardment, it suddenly stopped and a strange silence took over the entire area.

With rifles ready we waited to see if the Germans would come out of the woods and attack. Time seemed to pass very slowly. In the distance, two German soldiers, with their hands above their heads, were walking towards us to surrender. When they were in full view, two shots rang out in rapid fire - the two men fell before they were able to take another step.

I yelled "Stop firing - they were surrendering,' Perhaps more of them want to give up - Hold your fire!"

After this, two more Germans appeared, one carrying a white flag. They were approaching our lines when two more shots were heard, this time from the woods. The Germans fell, a few feet from my position.

They had been shot in the back by their own men for wanting to surrender.

JUMP INTO DARKNESS

WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 1944

While on guard duty near a road, an old couple walked towards me, arm in arm. As they came closer I noticed they were both crying.

They said, "Bon jour," and the old man tipped his beret. As they passed me, I called to them, "Don't cry, the war will be over soon." They responded with a smile.

SNIPERS

Cue of our men was lying in the field badly wounded. Wearing a red cross on their helmets made our medics a ready target for the German snipers. At the time it seemed impossible to rescue this soldier. The calls of "Medic - Medic" coming from the field became unbearable and made us all anxious to help him.

I returned to the field with two German prisoners, carrying a stretcher. We decided to let them go and pick up the trooper, thinking that they wouldn't fire at their own men.

After alerting every one of our plans, we sent the Germans into the field to carry the wounded man out,

Keeping our rifles aimed at the Germans, we were prepared to shoot them if they attempted to escape.

Without hesitation, they walked over to the wounded trooper, calmly put him on the stretcher and carried him to up. Looking at the Germans approvingly I gave them some cigarettes.