

## A Rendezvous with Destiny; Leaping from the Sky to Defend the Free World

*The Life and Service of Private Robert "Roy" James Chipman, Company F 508 Parachute Infantry*

30 September 1920-6 July 1944



*Roy Chipman circa 1942. Image Courtesy of Loraine Koski*

*The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding, go out to meet it.*

*Thucydides*

## Preface

In the study of Twentieth Century warfare, discussion can quickly turn to the discussion of mechanization, industrialization, and logistics being the way in which the Axis powers of Europe were defeated. And for the most part, this is entirely true.

Industrialization paved the way for new forms of warfare never seen in the world and at a level which has never been matched. Perhaps the third of the truly global conflicts, the Second World War touched lives and communities from Russia to Rabaul and from Champion, Michigan to La Haye du Puits.

Scholarship has perhaps rightly focused on the upper echelons of the war. With the scale of war in World War Two, any study of even minor characters takes up hundreds of characters, and individual campaigns serve as the topic of intense discussion to the present. But modern scholarship must not forget the one unifying factor of war, from the prehistoric to the present; war is at its base a clash of individuals more than it is a clash of culture, class, or creed. While idealism and a myriad of other causes may raise their head to spark war, it is the individual that must carry the rifle, fly the plane, or pilot the ship. Soldiers fight for a nation or cause to be sure, but there is always a different driving factor for each man in a company to enlist, for each soldier to fight and struggle and potentially die. These reasons make the soldier more so than their training or philosophy or any other amalgamating factor in the transition from civilian to soldier.

Roy Chipman is emblematic of the rapidly changing nature of both the United States and warfare. Just as the lines between communities blurred through the introduction of faster trains, faster cars, and commercial airlines, so too



*Figure 1: Modern day Marquette, Michigan, only miles from Champion, Michigan. Photo courtesy of the Michigan History Online Magazine, Michigan State University.*

blurred the lines between fighting in the air and fighting on the ground. But the road to hill 95 outside La Haye du Puit is a long road for trooper Chipman, marked by many of the same milestones that modern youth pass their adolescent years with.

But we should also endeavor to place Roy Chipman in the context of his time. He was a part of the largest three-dimensional engagement in world history. To understand him, we must understand the army he was a part of and the larger invasion in Normandy. From Chicago's Fort Sheridan, to Camp Blanding, Florida, and later to Northern Ireland and later yet Normandy; Roy Chipman allows for both a deeper understanding World War Two.

## **The Chipman Family and Champion Michigan**

The Chipman family, while firmly ensconced in Northern Michigan by the time of Roy's enlistment in 1942, was simply at the end of a long march to the Americas. Alfred Chipman, Roy's grandfather, migrated to the United States from England in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. Born in 1840 in Redruth, Cornwall, Alfred migrated to the United States sometime after 1861, but before 1869, where the historical record has him living in Cornwall in an 1861 report and the birth of his first child in Michigan in 1869. His wife, Catherine, was born in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia sometime in 1851. With the birth of her first child in 1869, her move to the United States from Canada may have occurred closer to her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, but no evidence can be found to the exact date or year of immigration in her early life years, until the record of birth for her daughter Elizabeth Chipman in 1869.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 2: A map of the United Kingdom with Cornwall highlighted in red. The Chipman family immigrated from this region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the New World. Map courtesy of Google Earth, 2020.

The Chipman family was a large family, with eight children listed on the 1880 census report. Four more children, the youngest of these being Richard James Chipman, later the father of Roy Chipman. The Chipman family at its largest was eleven members, but Rosa and Alfred Chipman (Richard's two immediate older siblings), died in adolescence.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Chipman, 1851 England Census, Class: HO107; Piece: 1915; Folio: 290; Page: 37; GSU roll: 221069; From Ancestry.com (Accessed 23 February 2020).  
Alfred Chipman, 1861 England Census, Class: RG 9; Piece: 1580; Folio: 17; Page: 27; GSU roll: 542834; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 23 February 2020).  
Alfred Chipman, 1880 U.S Federal Census Ely, Marquette, Michigan; Roll: 594; Family History Film: 1254594; Page: 387D; Enumeration District: 018; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 23 February 2020).  
Catherine Thexton, 1880 U.S Federal Census, Ely, Marquette, Michigan; Roll: 594; Family History Film: 1254594; Page: 387D; Enumeration District: 018; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 24 February 2020).  
Catherine Thexton, 1930 U.S Federal Census, Ishpeming, Marquette, Michigan; Roll: 1010; Page: 4B; Enumeration District: 0014; FHL microfilm: 2340745; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 24 February 2020).

Alfred Chipman the elder and Catherine married in 1878 in Humboldt, Marquette, Michigan. Alfred senior is listed as being a copper miner in the 1861 English census and a similar entry is listed in the 1880 United States census, and it is probable that he continued this profession in one of the local copper mines in the Marquette, Michigan area.<sup>2</sup>

Census records for the period between 1870 and 1930 have the Chipman family staying in the area around Marquette, Michigan, in areas including Champion, Norway, and Ely, and the cities of Ishpeming and Humbolt, Michigan. Roy's Grandfather died in 1902 at age 62 at the Tri Mountain Copper Mine. At the time of writing, no information is available to determine how this death occurred.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3: A former mining stack in Cornwall, like the type the Chipman ancestors may have worked on. Photo by MikeMcC, 2017. Photo courtesy of Pixabay.

Roy's father, Richard James Chipman, was born 12 March 1887 in Norway Township, Menominee, Michigan. His father died in 1902 and his older brother Alfred died in 1907, but the first real textual evidence of a milestone in the life of Richard Chipman is his marriage to Minnie P. Thexton on 3 June 1911. The couple was listed as living in Champion Township, Michigan on the 1920 Census and Richard is listed as a railroad fireman. Of interesting note, Richard

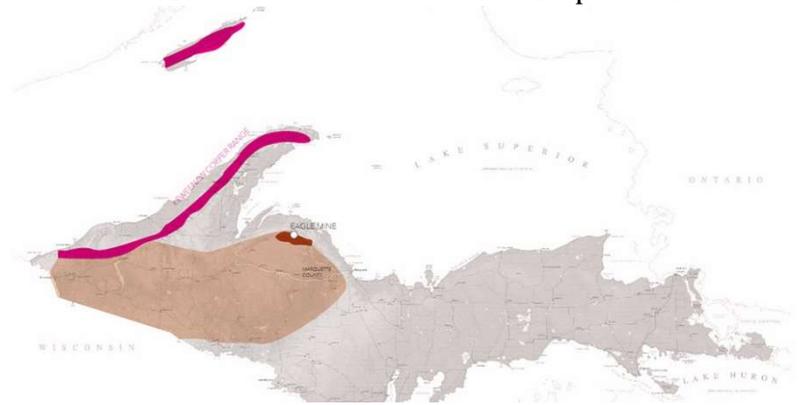


Figure 4: A map of copper and copper sulfide deposits in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Marquette is in the dark red band, which indicates a known copper sulfide deposit. Map graphic by Elizabeth Yarina, 2015. Map graphic courtesy of Scenario Journal.

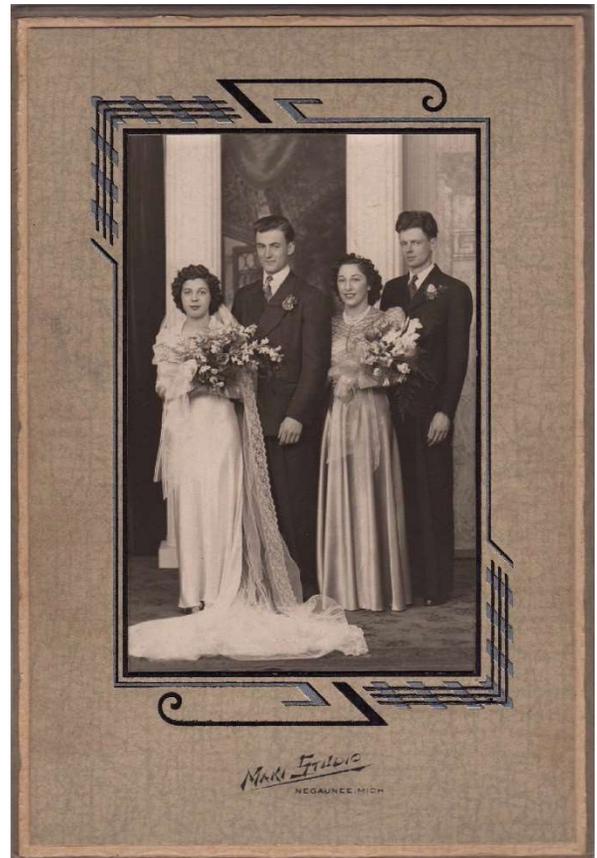
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Chipman, Michigan, Death Records, 1867-1950; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 24 February 2020).

lists Scotch as his primary language, as opposed to English. This is not explained in later census documentation, and never appears again.<sup>4</sup>

Roy's grandparents on the maternal side have a story like that of his paternal side. Born in 1861, Roy's grandfather, William Thexton was born in 1861 somewhere in England, and is listed as being a mason for a mine in the area.<sup>5</sup> William's wife, Mary Thexton was born in 1864 also in England. The couple had two daughters, Jennie and Jenea, shortly after their marriage. In 1886, the couple immigrated to the United States, and are listed as living in Northern Michigan for both the 1900 and 1910 Census.<sup>6</sup>

Roy's mother, Minnie Thexton, was born in 1884 in the area around Marquette, Michigan. In the 1900 census she was listed as being 16, and living with her parents in Ishpeming Ward 4, Marquette, Michigan. She was one of eight children. In 1911, Minnie Thexton and Richard Chipman marry in Ishpeming, Michigan. Their first child, Clifford was born that same year, with five more children born to the couple,



*Figure 5: Roy & Carmen's 1940 wedding portrait. Roy and Carmen are likely to the left. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski.*

<sup>4</sup> Richard James Chipman 1920 U.S Federal Census; Champion, Marquette, Michigan; Roll: T625\_784; Page: 5A; Enumeration District: 214; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 24 February 2020).

<sup>5</sup> The surname *Texton* and *Thexton* appears on census records for the family throughout their life. For the sake of uniformity, this paper has opted for the more traditional spelling of the word more associated with the family before their immigration.

<sup>6</sup> Minnie J. Thexton 1900 U.S Federal Census; Ishpeming Ward 4, Marquette, Michigan; Roll: 728; Page: 19B; Enumeration District: 0112; FHL microfilm: 1240728; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 25 February 2020).

Minnie J. Thexton 1910 U.S Federal Census; Ishpeming Ward 4, Marquette, Michigan; Roll: T624\_662; Page: 18A; Enumeration District: 0180; FHL microfilm: 1374675; from Ancestry.com (Accessed 25 February).

including Roy Chipman. The family remained in the Marquette area for the duration of their lives, with both Richard and Minnie interred at Ishpeming.<sup>7</sup>

Located near the southern shore of Lake Superior, Champion, Michigan is a small enclave located in Marquette County, Michigan. With a total population of just over 40,000 in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Champion was a town that developed and thrived off the mining and logging trades of Northern Michigan. Typically, copper and iron, the mining industries of Northern Michigan had a ubiquitous nature in the lives of family in the area. Major mines were in the area around Marquette and Champion, close to Marquette, profited from the rail line built through to connect Duluth, Minnesota, and Detroit, Michigan through the Duluth, South Shore and Atlantic Railway, Originally the Detroit, Mackinac, and Marquette Railroad.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 6: The Mackinaw St Ignace MI State Car & Rail Ferry Docks with a waiting rail ferry, date unknown. This was the primary rail link between the Upper Peninsula and cities like Detroit. Photo by Clyde Johnson, date unknown. Photo courtesy of Flickr.

<sup>7</sup> Minnie J. Thexton, Richard James Chipman; 1900, 1910, 1920 U.S Federal Census

<sup>8</sup> *Michigan's Railroad History*. Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Transportation, 2014.

## Early Life

Roy Chipman and his twin William Chipman were born in Champion, Michigan, on September 30, 1920. Born to parents Richard and Minnie Chipman, Robert James “Roy” Chipman was the older twin, born before his brother William “Bill” Chipman. Attending grade school in Champion Township, Roy left high school after his junior year.<sup>9</sup>

Roy married Carmen Theresa Portale on January 7, 1940. His older brother Clifford served as his best man at Saint John’s Church in Ishpeming, Michigan. While the date of this divorce is unknown, mentions from Minnie Chipman’s diary on July 10, 1943 put it sometime before this. The entry mentions alimony that Carmen received from Roy while he was away at



Figure 7: The Chipman home as it appeared in 2003. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski.



Figure 8: Bob and Roy as babies with their mother, Minnie. Unknown date. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski.

<sup>9</sup> Loraine Koski “Roy Chipman Biography” (Unpublished manuscript, January 2020), Manuscript.

training. While this does not give a specific date of occurrence, this hints that the divorce most likely occurred in late 1942, as Carmen remarried one Al Warren.<sup>10</sup>

During his pre-war years, Roy was employed at Republic Steel Corporation's Crombie Mine in Negaunee. While his profession at the time is unknown, the *Marquette War Record* gives evidence that he may have been an electrician. Roy officially registered for the draft in Marquette on February 16, 1942. Not waiting for his draft number to be called, Roy enlisted in the Paratroopers on November 10 of that same year. Moved to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, Roy Chipman entered the original class of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment at Camp Blanding, Florida.<sup>11</sup>

### 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment

With the outbreak of war in Europe, armies around the world began experimenting with the rules of warfare so recently established in the fires of World War 1. The lines between land, sea, and air warfare blurred as new weapons, new tactics, and new technological advances changed the way war was both conceived on the strategic level and executed on the tactical level. Critical among these advances were the development and subsequent modernization of airborne infantry. With the intent to descend behind enemy lines and cause havoc, or pave the pathway for more concerted invasions, airborne



Figure 9: The unit crest for the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, circa 1951. Artist unknown, photo courtesy of the Pentagon Department of Heraldry.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

troops had both captured headlines and territory around the globe. The United States, though a relative late comer to the war, trained and employed the largest airborne forces in the world, with multiple regiments in both the European and Pacific Theater of operation, and often being double the size of their European counterparts.

The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (508 PIR) was authorized to form under the command of Major Roy E. Lindquist on 9 September 1942. The unit formed with elements of the 502nd PIR and the 26th Infantry Division. Lindquist officially assumed command when the unit was authorized to form on 20 October 1942 under paragraph one of general order #51, date 13 October 1942. The unit processed 4,500 enlisted personnel, of which 2,300 received clearance to train.<sup>12</sup>



*Figure 10: The “Red Devil” patch for the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, designed and implemented shortly after the regiment’s formation. Designed by technician fourth grade Andrew J. Sklivis, 1942. Photo courtesy of the 508 Infantry Regiment website.*

Training and developing, the 508 PIR lacked unique identifying insignia that provide underlying identity in combat. Technician fourth grade Andrew Sklivis provided some of this identity with the iconic “Red Devil” insignia, which is still used to the present. The unit trained until just before Christmas when the men received a pass to go to Jacksonville, Florida, for Christmas shopping.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Unit History, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation “Neptune”, Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG–508–0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Following this training, the 508 moved to Fort Benning, Georgia to complete parachute training incrementally throughout January. By March 7, 1943, the 508 PIR was officially a trained paratrooper regiment.<sup>14</sup>

Following their March graduation from paratrooper's school, the unit started a 13-week training, building up experience with parachute drops and more experience in the field. Later in 1943, the unit made their first night drop. Later in 1943, the unit participated in maneuvers in August and September in the area of Taylorsville Tennessee. In secondary operations, the 508th PIR operated in maneuvers as a conventional infantry unit due to a shortage of transport planes. Notable in these secondary

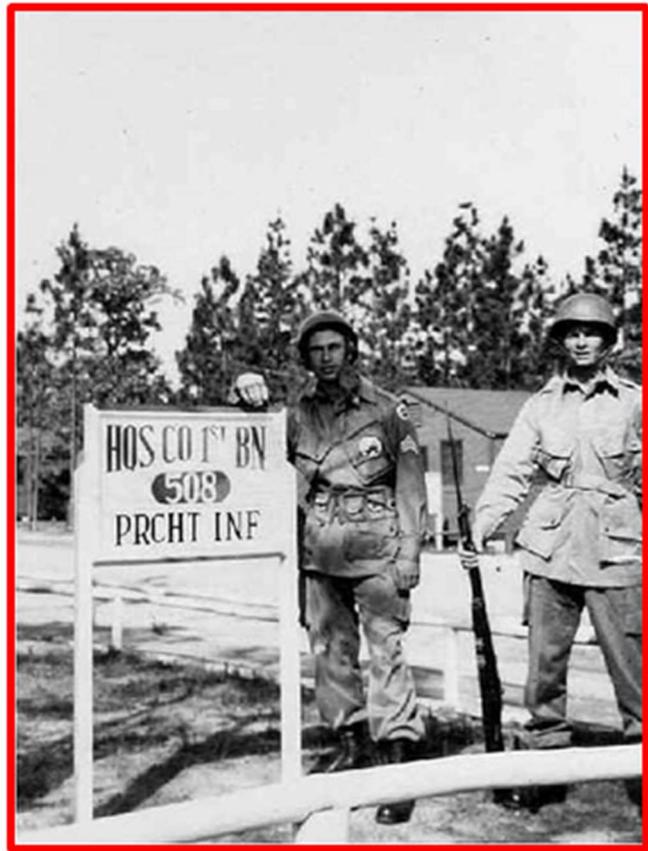


Figure 11: HQ-Tehan, Martin. "Standing Guard Outside HQ 1st Battalion." Photograph. Circa, 1942. From *Training, Camp Blanding. The Family and Friends of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association*. Photo courtesy of the 508<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Website.

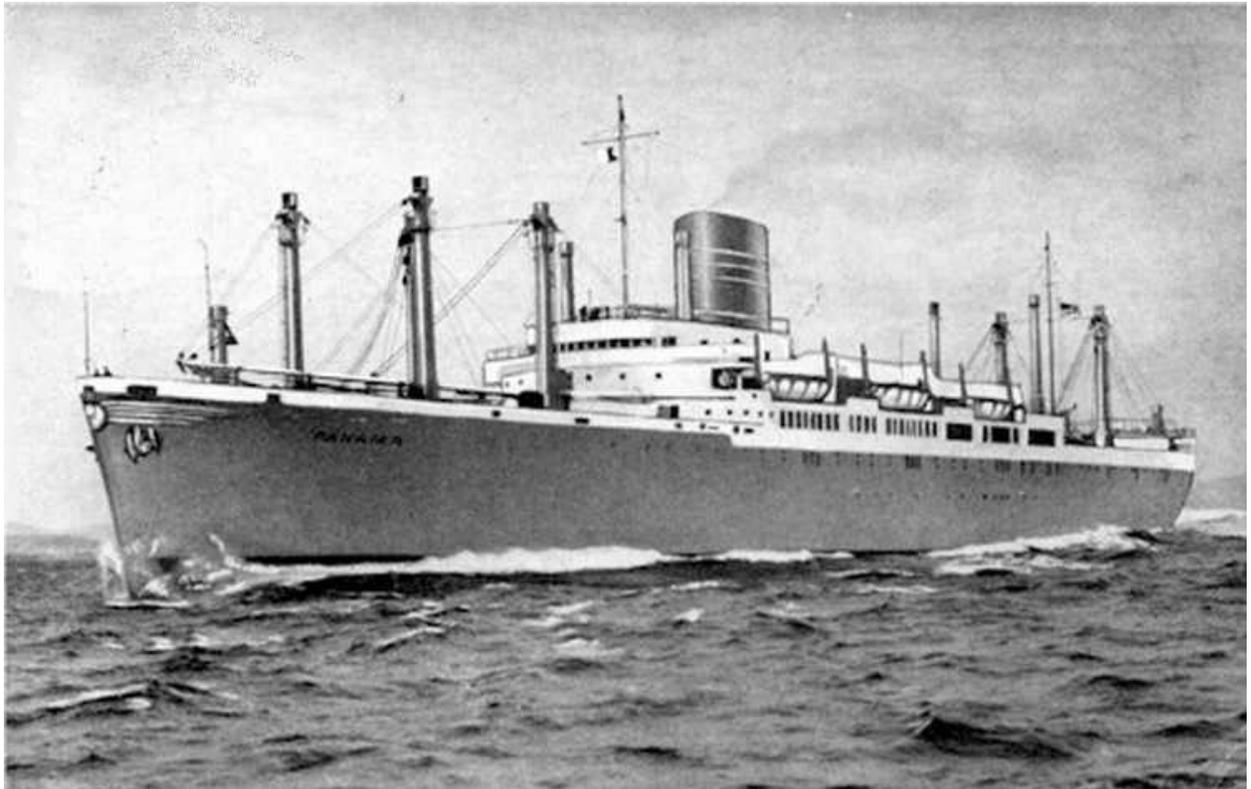
exercises was a maneuver where the 508 crossed the Cumberland River and held the town of Gladesville, Tennessee. The unit held off resistance to their capture, but by the end of the exercise, all three of the Battalions of the 508 were considered destroyed by the umpires of the exercise.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

The 508 PIR trained for the remainder of 1943, and in December departed from Camp Mackall, North Carolina for Camp Shanks, New York. Taking four trains, the 508 PIR arrived in New York on 20 December 1943. Once in camp, the unit billeted and underwent embarkation procedures for their move to England. On December 27 1943, the 508 PIR boarded transport and embarked for England, arriving shortly after the new year. Roy Chipman, a Private at the time, was onboard the USAT James Parker and a product of the original training regimen of the 508. He was one of many men who saw the Statue of



*Figure 12: A sketch USAT James Parker as she appeared before her war service as the USS Panama, circa 1939. The voyage on the James Parker took the regiment across the ocean and from 1943 to 1944. Unknown author and date. Courtesy of the 508<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment website.*

Liberty fade into the distance, and the steel grey of the Atlantic widen, and beyond some unknown horizon, the enemy he had trained to meet awaited.<sup>16</sup>

## Enlistment and Training

As was the case for many men across the United States at the outbreak of war, Roy received a draft card in the early years of the war. The *Daily Mining Journal* reported in early 1942 that Roy was back home in Champion, waiting for his draft number to be called. However, in November of that year, either from impatience or patriotism, Roy enlisted in the Paratroopers.<sup>17</sup>

After enlisting in the US Army Airborne, Roy Chipman went through a series of trainings designed to prepare him for combat, after parachuting behind enemy lines. First, Roy trained at Camp Blanding, Florida. Training at Blanding consisted of fitness and marksmanship training, and during this time, Roy Chipman was promoted to private first class (PFC). Roy was assigned to a .30 caliber machine gun team in his squad at this time, in addition to his normal rifle training. In this, Roy stood out. Scoring a 228, Roy Chipman qualified as an expert marksman. This basic training preceded paratrooper's training at Fort Benning, Georgia in early 1943. Officially graduating from Parachutist's School in March of 1943, Roy Chipman was a newly minted member of the airborne infantry. Made a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, Roy Chipman trained as part of this new formation. This training included night drops and maneuvers, perhaps the most riveting of these being in Tennessee, where a letter sent from Roy detailed a harrowing encounter as part of a parachute drop.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Loraine Koski "Roy Chipman Biography" (Unpublished manuscript, January 2020), Manuscript.

<sup>18</sup> Loraine Koski "Roy Chipman Biography" (Unpublished manuscript, January 2020), Manuscript.



Figure 13: A C-46 transport plane loading troops at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. Troop planes like this were common in training for parachute infantrymen throughout the war. Unknown photographer and date. Photo courtesy of the 508<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Website.

*“It was midnight when we loaded into the plane, and we flew northeast for about an hour. Then the squad leader told us to stand up and hook up our ripcords. In six minutes we got the red light warning before the jump, then the green light flashed--two minutes before the jump. The squad leader jumped first. I was number six. I got out the door okay, but after falling about 150 feet I felt someone swing into my chute. I looked up and there was another paratrooper falling through my lines. He swung back and forth and then my chute collapsed. His stayed open, but was tangled up in mine and we were tied together. We dropped fast and fell about 1,000 feet that way. About 50 feet off the ground, by a miracle, I got my chute open. We hit the ground pretty hard, but all I got was a little bump on the head and a small cut on the nose. The other man wasn't hurt. We landed three feet from a barbed wire fence...We're both lucky guys to come out of that experience with only bumps and scratches.”<sup>19</sup>*

<sup>19</sup> Loraine Koski “Roy Chipman Biography” (Unpublished manuscript, January 2020), Manuscript.

While the 508 was not quite ready for combat, training continued throughout 1943. In preparation for the invasion of Normandy, the regiment moved prepared for embarkation overseas. The unit arrived at Camp Shanks, New York in three trains on 19 December 1943. 9 days later, 508 PIR embarked on the USAT James Parker for Belfast, Northern Ireland. The James Parker entered Belfast Harbor 8 January 1944, and the unit disembarked for the Cromore Estate and more advanced training until March. During this time, Roy is promoted to corporal on 7 March and later a letter from Roy to his mother alludes to his promotion to Sargent.<sup>20</sup>

On 10 March 1944, the 508 PIR boarded trains for Belfast Harbor once again and embarked on a ferry to Glasgow on 11 March. Two days later, the unit disembarked in Glasgow Harbor, boarding trains to Wollaton Park, Nottinghamshire, England. The unit continued to train in Nottinghamshire until May, including practice jumps and assembly over England.<sup>21</sup>

During this period, the 504 PIR, recovering from operations in Italy was officially removed from the airborne roster for Normandy. The 508 PIR, untested as a unit, replaced them in the order of battle for the 82nd Airborne Division. As May turned to June, all eyes swept across the Channel and the invasion sure to come. Additionally, during the period between March and June of 1944, Roy Chipman was demoted back to private. This is not

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<sup>20</sup> Dick O'Donnell, "Roy Chipman-Facts" (unpublished table, January 2020), Spreadsheet.  
508 PIR website and unit history

<sup>21</sup> 508 PIR website and unit history

explained in any sources but is marked in the Regimental History as being a private by the time of the Normandy landings.<sup>22</sup>

## Operation Neptune

The war for the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment of the American 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division truly started 28 May 1944. The unit journal notes that “all units of the combat echelon were moved to their respective airfields...2nd Battalion to TRENCH airfield.” Jumping with the 508 would be elements from the 307 Engineer Battalion, the headquarters company of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Signal Company and Divisional Artillery. Roy Chipman was one of 543 Enlisted men and 39 officers of second battalion. In preparation for the jump, the unit trained on night problems and assembly drills, in addition to water ditching and dingy boat drills. Two days before the invasion, each man in Company F received 200 Francs (or one British pound), in addition to maps. A 24-hour stand-down issued to the regiment pushed the processes for pre-invasion back to the night of June 5. Boarding for Overlord commenced at 2030, and the aircraft of 2nd Battalion’s serial ascended in good order at 2345.<sup>23</sup>

The American forces to be dropped into Normandy for the achievement of these objectives were divided into two operations, each with subsequent reinforcement operations. These missions named after

AIRBORNE OPERATIONS 5-6 JUNE 1944	
OPERATION NEPTUNE	
OPERATION ALBANY-101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION	00:20 HR
OPERATION BOSTON-82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION	01:20 HR
OPERATION CHICAGO-101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION	04:00 HR
OPERATION DETROIT-82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION	04:00 HR
OPERATION KEOKUK-101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION	21:00 HR
OPERATION ELMIRA-82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION	21:00 HR

Figure 14: Timetables for the operations and later reinforcements of glider and parachute infantry on the night of 5-6 June 1944. Graphic by author.

<sup>22</sup>Lorraine Koski “Roy Chipman Biography” (Unpublished manuscript, January 2020), Manuscript. Dick O’Donnell, “Roy Chipman-Facts” (unpublished table, January 2020), Spreadsheet. Unit Journal, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation “Neptune”, Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG-508-0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>23</sup> Koski, “Roy Chipman Biography.”

American cities and organized at the times they began. The first missions were divided between missions Boston and Albany. Albany would drop the 101<sup>st</sup> parachute regiments, while Boston would drop the 82<sup>nd</sup>'s troops. Later, in missions Chicago and Detroit, glider elements of the same divisions would be flown in, with Chicago bringing in elements of the 101<sup>st</sup> and Detroit bringing in elements of the 82<sup>nd</sup>. A further two missions at the end of the day would bring in reinforcements with Keokuk reinforcing the 101<sup>st</sup> and Elmira reinforcing the 82<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>24</sup>

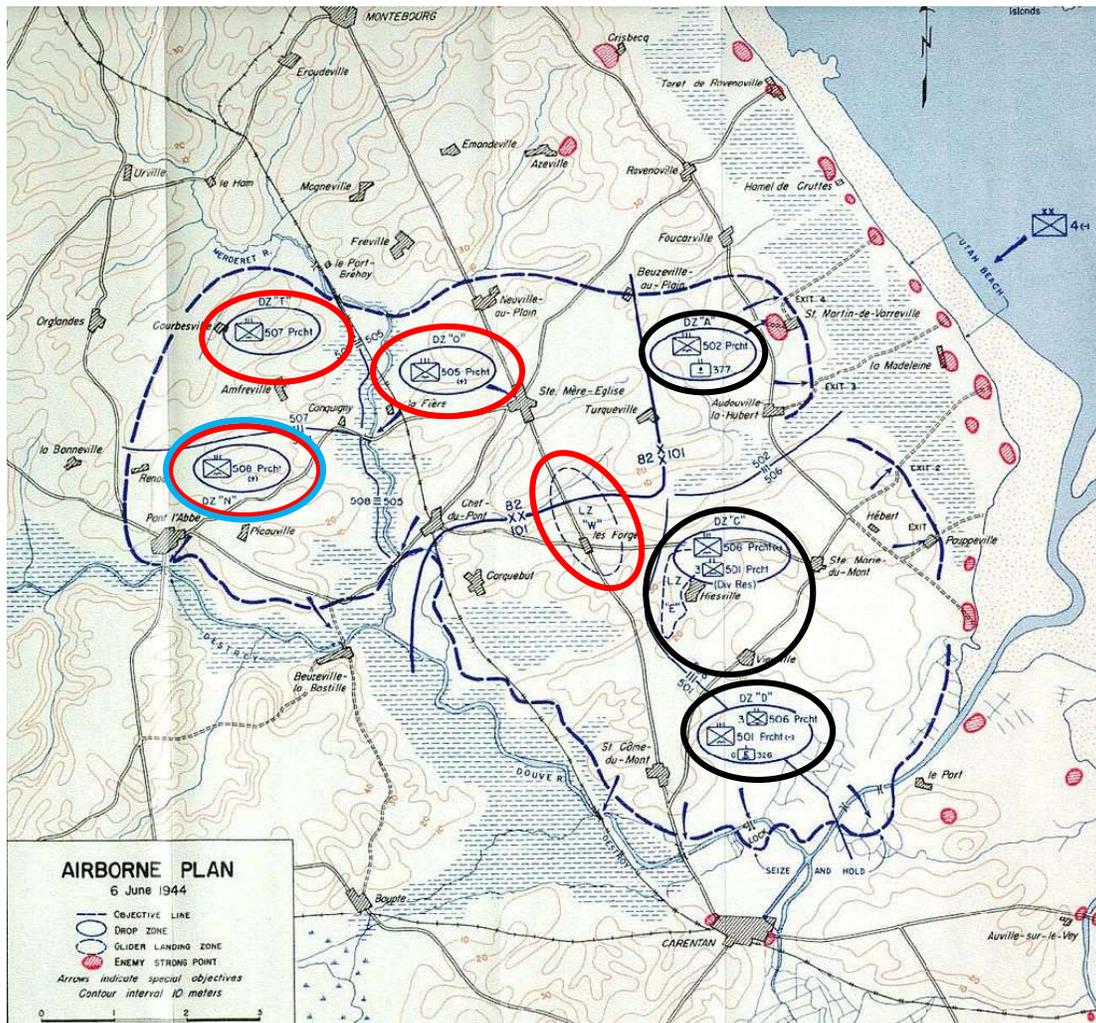


Figure 15: A map of the airborne plan for 5-6 June 1944, with glider and parachute zones marked. Elements of the 82<sup>nd</sup> are circle in red, elements of the 101<sup>st</sup> are circled in black. Trooper Chipman's drop zone is marked with a red and blue circle. Photo courtesy of the Ste. Mere Église Airborne Museum.

<sup>24</sup> "D-Day American Airborne Operations," D-Day Overlord (Marc Laurenceau), Accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/d-day/air-operations/usa>.

Albany, slated to begin just after midnight on June 6, and the later reinforcement operations Chicago and Keokuk launched parachute and glider elements of the 101<sup>st</sup> into Normandy as part of Operation Neptune. With the main drop zones at Saint-Martin-de-Varreville, Hiesville, and Angoville-au-Plain, paratroopers dropped for Albany would be reinforced by glider troops at 04:00 and 21:00 landing at Hiesville. Boston, the operation to land and reinforce the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne, began after 01:00 on June 6, and would land parachutists at Picaucville, Sainte-Mère-Église, and Amfreville. Later glider-borne reinforcements were slated to land at Sainte-Mère-Église at 04:00 and at Les Forges at 21:00. The 82<sup>nd</sup> would be reinforced a further two times as part of missions Galveston and Hackensack on June 7.<sup>25</sup>

Preceding the operations for the airborne, Pathfinder teams of 10 men (nine men and an officer) would be dropped approximately half an hour in advance of the main jumps to serve as navigational aides for the troop carriers. Deploying five lights in the shape of a “T,” the pathfinder lights would give the signal to the other pilots when to drop their paratroopers. Similarly, Pathfinder teams would place seven lights for glider troops, marking the direction of the ground winds.<sup>26</sup>

Operation Albany began at 00:20 with the drop of pathfinder elements, and Boston began an hour later with their own pathfinders dropping. After this drop of pathfinders, problems began for the air transport wings and their cargo. Due to heavy anti-aircraft fire, over 75% of paratroopers dropped were not dropped on to their planned DZs and were scattered across the Cotentin Peninsula. Dropped troopers began to form ad hoc units, fighting towards their

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<sup>25</sup> “Objectives and sectors of the 101st Airborne Division,” D-Day Overlord (Marc Laurenceau), Accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/d-day/air-operations/usa/101st-airborne-objectives>.

“Objectives and Sectors of the 82nd Airborne Division,” D-Day Overlord (Marc Laurenceau), Accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/d-day/air-operations/usa/82nd-airborne-objectives>.

<sup>26</sup> Yves Buffetaut, and Yoann Marliere. *101ST Airborne in Normandy: June 1944*, Translated by Hannah McAdams. Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Books, 2017, 9.

objectives as mixed companies from both 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> airborne divisions. Later drops of the glider-borne troops were impacted by the *Bocage* country of Normandy, with catastrophic losses from crashes into Norman hedgerows. Flying low and in small groups to avoid radar, and then quickly rise to a safe altitude to drop their sticks of troopers. Enemy flak fire, and weather disrupted these plans, causing troops to be scattered across their drop-zones and beyond, ensuring that the airborne landings for both the British and American forces would be truncated and chaotic.<sup>27</sup>

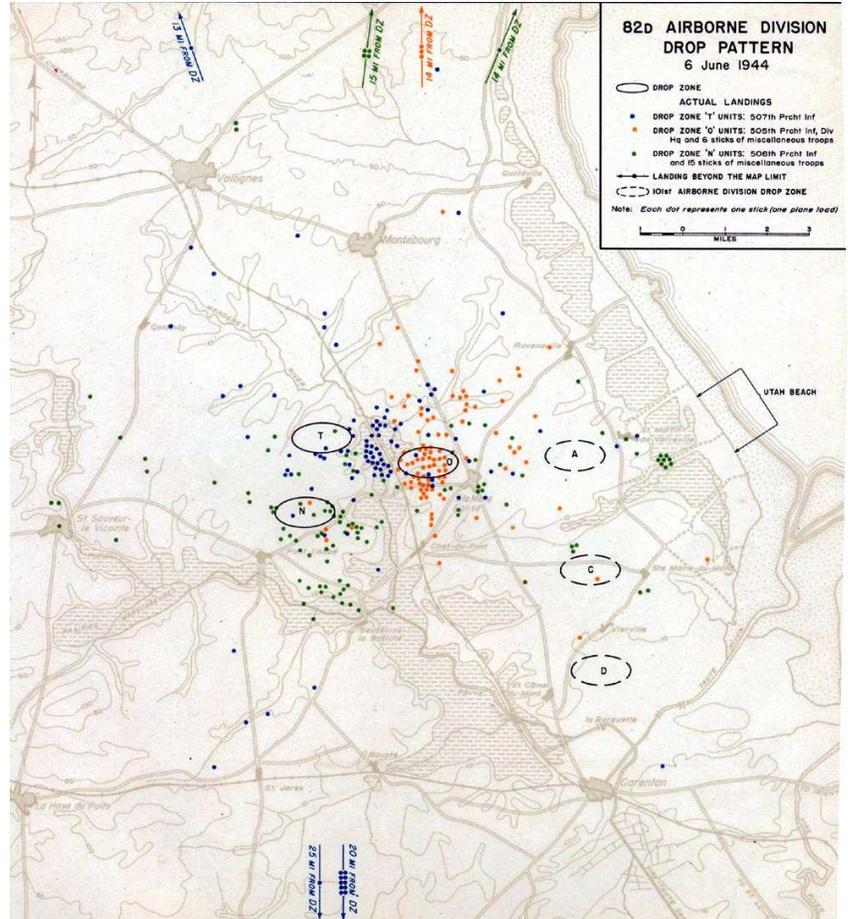


Figure 16: A map of the intended drop zones again, but with dots to mark the actual landings of troops. The 508 PIR is in green. Map courtesy of the Air Mobility Command Museum, Dover, Delaware.

But troops would handle this adversity differently in their approaches, but one mention has perhaps the most ubiquitous presence in the lead up to the descent from the sky by troopers;

<sup>27</sup> "D-Day American Airborne Operations," D-Day Overlord (Marc Laurenceau), Accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/d-day/air-operations/usa>.

George E. Koskimaki, *D-Day with the Screaming Eagles* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2013)) 88-91. Norman hedgerows, existent for centuries by the time of the Overlord landings, were originally thought to be like the English hedgerows, consisting of ornamental hedges. By contrast, the Norman hedgerows were often made of large trees and high stacked stone piles that would serve as both strongpoints for fighting and barriers for armored vehicles. (See Doubler bibliography entry for more details).

the constant and overwhelming presence of anti-aircraft fire. Corporal John Marohn of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, “Tracers from the ground fire made a zig-zag pattern...almost thick enough to walk down on.” Similarly, Richard Winters, also of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, would write in a letter that “there’s some anti-aircraft fire- blue, green, and red tracers coming up to meet us. Gee, it seems to come up slowly. They’re pretty wild with it...You can hear them crack as they go by.” This heavy fire caused immense disruption in the air formations that were told guns would be pointed at the beaches, waiting for landing. Pilots trying to avoid the fire often left their formations, leading to missed drops over land, or even over sea. In some cases, the pilots never even dropped their sticks of troopers. From the potent mixture of fear, enemy groundfire, and confusion, some troopers would be taken out of the fight before it even began.<sup>28</sup>

For the troopers that did drop, combat on the ground was immediate, savage, and characterized by the same confusions that plagued the jump. Sainte-Mère-Église served as a central skirmish point for elements of the Airborne, but due to heavy anti-air fire some elements were dropped in the village, and shot upon the ground, due to the Germans being out in force as a building had been struck with an incendiary and was on fire.



Figure 17: Aerial photograph of Ste. Mere Église after its capture in June of 1944. Unknown army photographer, June 1944. Photo courtesy of warfare history online magazine.

<sup>28</sup> Koskimaki, *With the Screaming Eagles*, 98-103.

Despite a short firefight leading to American forces capturing the village, the village would not be officially neutralized until morning. Kangaroo companies would have all four causeways captured by noon on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, meaning that all initial objectives had been secured.<sup>29</sup>

Company F of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment as part of the 82nd Airborne Division was slated to drop into Normandy due West of the Merderet River and to the North and East of Picauville and Font L'Abbe. These drops were part of the initial wave of parachutists in Operation Boston and the 508th was tasked with the destruction of bridges over the Douve River.

Their drop into Normandy was impacted by many of the same issues that impacted airborne units across the Cotentin Peninsula. The Company F Morning Report for June 6 (though officially written some days later), records that the unit “Jumped over France at 0210 hour. Flack very heavy. Jumped before hitting DZ (drop zone).

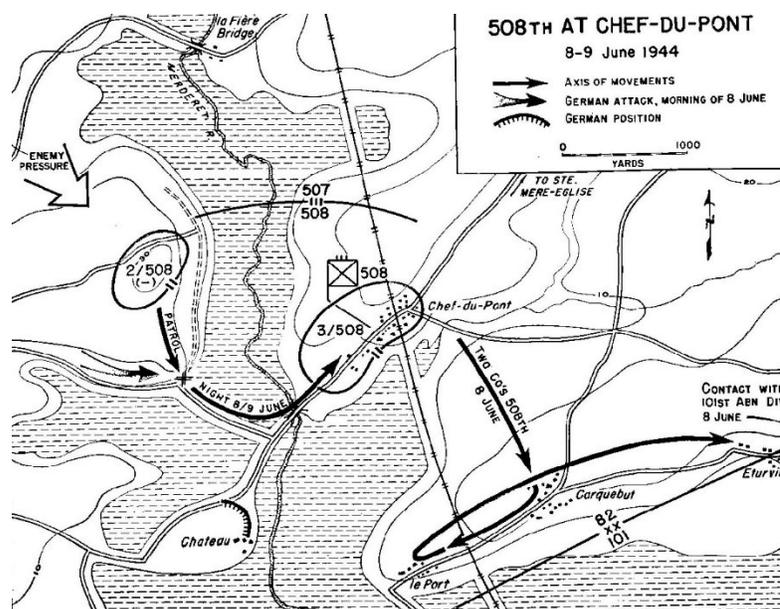


Figure 18: Map of the Chef Du Pont area, 8-9 June 1944. Map courtesy of the Army Center for Military History.

Unable to locate battalion assembly area, enemy surrounded troops cutting off route to approximate battalion area.” The Battalion engaged the Germans in the vicinity of Sainte Mere Église, likely *Osttruppen* units of the 1049th and 1051st Regiment of the 91st *Luftlande Infanterie-Division*, as evidenced from S-2 reports from days after the 508th lands in Normandy. The unit also recorded action against the 265th *Infanterie-Division* (a static defense division

<sup>29</sup> “D-Day American Airborne Operations,” D-Day Overlord (Marc Laurenceau), Accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/d-day/air-operations/usa>.

raised in Normandy for the purpose of defending the Atlantic Wall) in the period between 6 June and 20 June.<sup>30</sup>

The 508 PIR unit journal notes that on D-Day, some members of the unit landed “just east of the Merderet River in the flooded area east of the river visible from where we landed.” This puts the unit in the area approximately near the map



Figure 19: Chef du Pont shortly after the invasion. Unknown photographer, 1944. Image courtesy of the 508<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Website.

squares of 31-33 and 97-93 of Lambert Zone Vt.<sup>31</sup> The unit then moved south and west, towards the original objective of Chef-du-Pont, encountering some resistance by machine gun fire around dawn.<sup>32</sup>

By early afternoon on June 6, the 508 PIR was operating near the Chef-du-Pont Bridge, and by 1600, unit journal notes that the bridge was secured, and the unit began fortifying the positions taken during the day. At approximately 2030, elements of the 508 PIR moved across

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<sup>30</sup> S-2 Reports, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation “Neptune”, Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG–508–0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Lorraine Koski “Roy Chipman Biography” (Unpublished manuscript, January 2020), Manuscript.

Samuel W. Mitcham, *German Order of Battle: 1st-290th Infantry Divisions in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007), 419.

Unit Journal, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation “Neptune”, Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG–508–0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>31</sup> For the duration of this paper, unless otherwise specified, this map is the base map to which referential points will be made.

<sup>32</sup> S-2 Reports, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation “Neptune”, Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG–508–0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

the bridge. Fighting around the bridge at Chef-du-Pont continued throughout the next few days, with artillery fire coming from the southwest.<sup>33</sup>

On 8 June, the 508 received word that approximately 300 German troops massed at coordinates 370920, in the area of Blosville.<sup>34</sup> This report did not result in contact, and nearby company G reported no contact with the Germans at that zone. The first prisoners taken by the 508 in Normandy were captured on 8 June around 1600, and 124 Germans surrendered at this time. Unit reports note that these troops were both from the 91 *Luftlande* and 907 static infantry division's *Osttruppen* formations, noting the presence of Russians disillusioned by war. By the end of the day on 8 June, the 508 cleared Etienville, Carquebut, and Leport.<sup>35</sup>

Over the following days, the 508 PIR confined itself to operations in the area immediately surrounding Chef du Pont. Holding the bridge, the 90th Infantry Division passed through Chef du Pont at an unknown time on 9 June. During this time, captured German soldiers confirmed that the opposition the 508 faced in their area of operation was also a paratrooper force, with paybooks on soldiers confirming this. Of note during this holding action is the presence of German dive bombers which hit an unknown town to the south of Chef du Pont,

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<sup>33</sup> Unit Journal, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation "Neptune", Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG-508-0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>34</sup> *This mapping system, common to the Second World War, uses a series of grids known as Lambert zones. Each unit was outfitted with a map to scale (1:50000 for the airborne infantry, according to national archives files), with corresponding zones. Each six-digit number is actually two three-digit numbers that instruct the leader to follow lines first east-west (the first two numbers) and then the third number is the percent off that line (E.G 5 being halfway). Then the second set of numbers instructs the reader to go north south and repeat the process. The intersection creates an approximately 300x300 yard square in the real world. Map data used in this report is translated to approximate locations and is sourced from the Maps and Overlays section of the 508 PIR archival record. (information on map translation sourced from interview of Dominic Amaral, Archivist at the United States Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA. Interview conducted by author.)*

<sup>35</sup> Unit Journal, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation "Neptune", Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG-508-0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

S-2 Reports, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation "Neptune", Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG-508-0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

starting fires. Additionally, the unit resupplied itself with captured German rations from a train, making specific note of butter and cheese in the preparation of a stew. On 11 June, the unit reported a strength of 87 officers and 1141 enlisted men.<sup>36</sup>

On 12 June, the 508 PIR advanced towards Bauzeville in order to cross the Douve River, and from there waited for a covering artillery barrage to lift. After crossing the Douve, the unit moved into Tallifer, but reported no enemy action in the village. The unit prepared defenses and to this end destroyed six German tanks of unknown type.<sup>37</sup>

Roy Chipman's 2nd Battalion moved towards the village of Baupte at 1350 on 13 June, in preparation for a 1700 attack on the village. The unit entered the village at 1800 and set to clearing out snipers, also noting the presence of enemy to the north of Baupte, evacuating wounded. Resistance was of mixed unit identity, with a Panzer regiment 2nd lieutenant of unknown regiment number specifically listed as captured. That evening the unit reported a disorganized withdrawal of German elements from the area, with strafing runs by allied aircraft on those attempting to evacuate.<sup>38</sup>

After capturing Baupte, the 508 moved their command post to a chateau close to Cretteville and contacted the 101st at 314850 (the crossing of the Canal D'aurers near Baupte). The unit prepared for a counterattack the following morning, and moved check the bridges at 297851 and 293858 (over smaller offshoots of the Canal de Paris west of Baupte), demolishing both at 1835. The following morning, the unit destroyed the bridge at Cretteville just after midnight and reported German vehicles at 299852 (southwest of Baupte, but north of the Canal

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

de Paris) at 0800. The expected German counterattack never materialized and the 508 withdrew the following morning after being relieved by the 507 PIR.<sup>39</sup>

The 508 moved by trucks through Picauville and established a new command post at Sauveur le Vicomte in a bakery. The unit noted that the village was heavily damaged by both artillery and bomb hits. Patrolling as far as Cretteville, the regiment prepared for another counterattack by mining the bridge south of the village and posting extra guards. The unit held, with trooper Chipman's second battalion noting their position at 182929, near Le Dufant at 1525 on 17 June.<sup>40</sup>

Mail reached the unit on 18 June, with eight bags distributed at 1215 and later in the day, Memorial Day services occurred in the division cemetery, with the regimental commanding officer (Lindquist) in attendance. St. Sauveur was shelled at 2100 for approximately two-and-a-half hours, with the final shells falling at 2330. A spotter plane attempted to find the offending artillery but did not make contact. 1st Battalion continued to be the focus of shelling, with 88mm shells being reported at 0100 hours on 19 June. Additionally, on 19 June, the 508 Parachute Infantry, in recognition of their service in the invasion of mainland Europe received a citation for outstanding performance. At 2230 hours, French civilians entered the command post in order to fire the bakery ovens in preparation for the unit's departure the following morning.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

The morning of 20 June saw the 1239 men of the 508 depart towards their new command post. The unit reached their command post at Le Bost at 1230. During this time the regiment received orders to move towards hill 131 in order to take part in the attack on the hill by the entire 82nd Airborne Division. Reveille for the regiment sounded at 0730 on 21 June and the unit checked weapons and issued recommendations for promotions and commendations at this time. The attack on hill 131 by the Division was postponed for 24



*Figure 20: Hill 131 today, taken from the slope of hill 95. Both hills were important objectives for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in the Normandy Campaign. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski, 2006.*

hours but was additionally indefinitely postponed the following day at 1800.<sup>42</sup>

The regiment remained in the area and trained, but this was not without issues. Reports of artillery still in the area mark the reports while training for the eventual attack on hill 131 was carried out. In a practice attack on 26 June, three men from the regiment were seriously wounded. 27 June marked more shelling on the regiment, and an unlikely tragedy. At 0730, an 81mm mortar round struck an artillery observation plane, blowing off the wing. Spotter plane number 329632 piloted by 2nd lieutenant Robert McAnich and spotter 1st Lieutenant Chas Wood were killed in the crash at coordinate 252895. Later that day, the unit received word that Cherbourg was in allied hands. The following day, three men from Chipman's company F

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

returned to the regiment after being captured on 6 June and escaping, holding out until they reached the unit.<sup>43</sup>

July started for the 508 in relatively calm straits as the unit patrolled towards hill 131, but did not directly advance on it. Sporadic exchanges of fire marked these occasions with both Germans and American airborne elements firing mortars and artillery at each other as the weather turned rainy in early July. The regiment moved into a new cp at coordinates 238902, in a forest that was barely navigable by vehicle. After digging in, some German mortar rounds fell in proximity to the new command post, but counter-battery fire by divisional artillery drove the offending mortar teams off in the night of 2-3 July. The unit then prepared for their final advance, south towards Le Haye du Puits.<sup>44</sup>

## July 1944 and Death

The advance between 3-

6 July 1944 saw the division move south from a position

triangulated between Varenguebec, La Dauderie, and the command post at Bois de Limors. On 3 July, the regiment advanced south, and captured positions between La Poterie and Blanchelande. The regiment halted at 2000 hour to rest overnight, and as the night came on “cold and clear” the

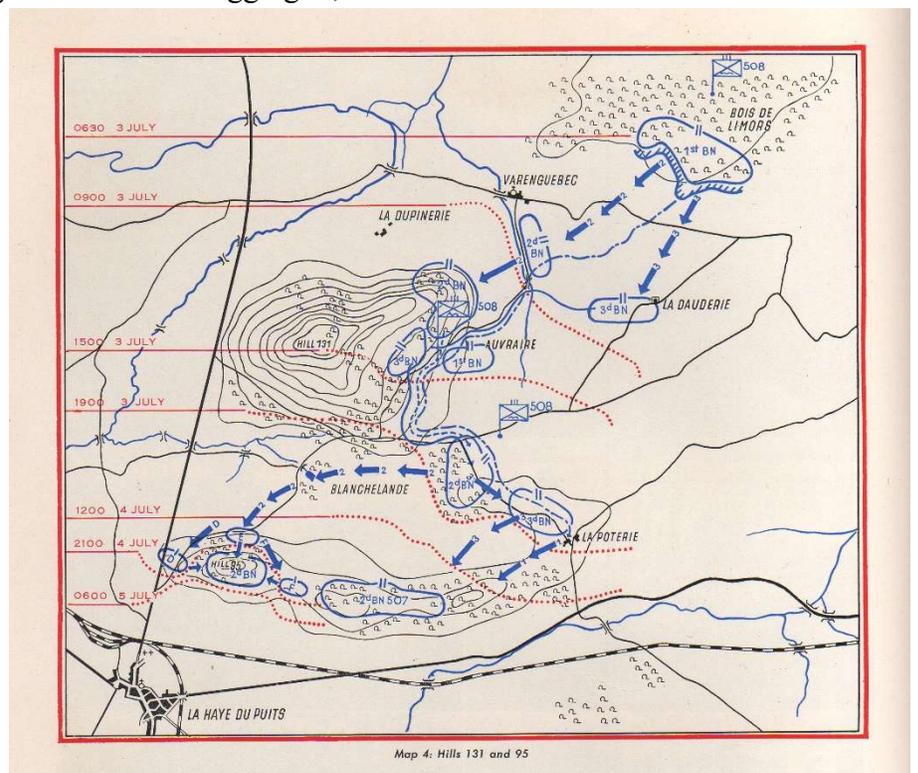


Figure 21: Advance by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division from 3 July to 5 July. Hill 131 is at center, with hill 95 to the south, towards La Haye Du Puits. Map courtesy of Loraine Koski.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

morale of the unit was high, and 1052 men of the 508 PIR prepared to attack south in the morning.<sup>45</sup>

The attack, scheduled for 0630 on 4 July, 1944 started half an hour late, with 1st Battalion not advancing until 0700, and 2nd Battalion joining the advance at 0730. During this advance, Lt. Colonel Alexander from 2nd Battalion was wounded and evacuated. Shortly after this, Regimental S-2,



*Figure 22 the front of Hill 95 as it would have appeared to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski, 2006.*

Captain Breen, was killed when his jeep triggered a road mine. By 11 AM, the advance stalled as fire from the target of 1st Battalion advances pinned down 3rd Battalion advances towards hill the valley between hills 131 and 95. By nightfall, the regiment had suffered heavy losses across the regiment with five commissioned officers killed and the effective strength of the regiment down to 780 enlisted men and 75 officers at 2400 on July 4. However, the unit remained “aggressive and willing to try anything.” The next days required all the aggressive and indomitable spirit the 508 could muster.<sup>46</sup>

On 5 July 1944 the regiment advanced south again, reporting a firefight by 1300 in the front of 3rd Battalion. The situation remained stable but unchanged throughout the day with firefights reported in front of 3rd Battalion most of the day. 6 July found 2nd Battalion of both the 508 and 507th PIR remained on the front lines, with elements of 2nd Battalion contacting the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

German lines at 1830. During this exchange, 23 prisoners were taken by Sargent Angress of 2nd Battalion, and German morale reported as low.<sup>47</sup>

July 6 found the regiment just north of La Haye du Puits, preparing to finish their drive into the village. As part of this, aggressive patrolling branched south towards German lines. During one of these patrols on hill 95, trooper Roy Chipman was



*Figure 23: Hill 95 from the south, with La Haye Du Puits in the foreground. This battlefield would be critical to the upcoming breakout towards St. Lo, further to the south. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski, 2006.*

killed by a sniper. According to a fellow trooper from Marquette, a small patrol moved forward, and a German sniper, concealed in a tree on hill 95 killed Roy and another trooper in a matter of seconds, with Roy killed instantly by a shot behind the ear. The patrol, followed by an armored advance at 2000 killed the sniper and attempted to move south towards the town, but 88mm fire prevented the tanks from advancing, and they withdrew back behind the hill and out of fire.<sup>48</sup>

Hill 95 and La Haye du Puits on July 6 marked the last day and last territory the 508 captured in the Normandy campaign. Fighting on the front occupied by 2nd Battalion remained intensive, up until the Battalion pulled off the line at 2400 on the night of 6-7 July 1944. The 508, now held in reserve, contacted units from the 121st and 8th Divisions respectively between 8-9 July, as the two divisions assumed the advance towards Saint Lo. Between 8 and 9 July, the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Unit Journal, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation "Neptune", Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG-508-0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Koski "Chipman Biography."

508 made ready to return to England from a rear staging and reserve posting and the Regimental Journal notes that all battalions of the 508 PIR “remained in Division reserve taking advantage of the opportunity to take showers and clean up...in preparation for the return to England.” On 12 July, the unit boarded two LSTs and returned to Southampton, England. After debarkation from the ships, the unit boarded trains to return to Nottingham, officially marking the return on 15 July 1944.<sup>49</sup>

The 508 PIR served in Normandy for a total of 36 days, from June 6 when the unit descended by parachute until July 12, when the LSTs returned to England. For those five weeks, the 508 paid a high price. According to the unit history, out of 2,056 troopers that made the jump into Normandy, 1,061 were casualties, including 307 were killed in action. While temporary at first in order to bolster their numbers, the 508 PIR remained attached to the 82nd Airborne for the remainder of the war, and up until the present date. The unit dropped as part of Operation Market-Garden two months after Normandy and saw service primarily in the area immediately surrounding Nijmegen.<sup>50</sup>

But trooper Chipman’s legacy does not stop with his death on 6 July. Deeply personal items returned to Michigan and to the loved ones he left behind. Evidence of his desire to let his parents know about his life in the paratroops is evidenced through his stamps and pens found on

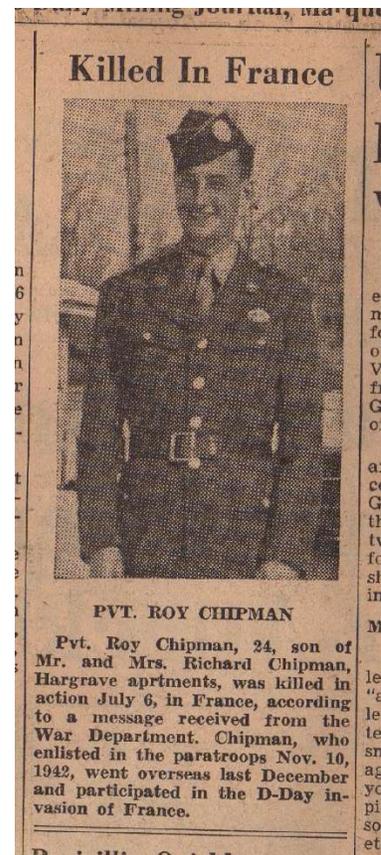


Figure 2: A newspaper clipping announcing the death of Trooper Roy Chipman in the Daily Mining Journal, 1944. Photo Courtesy of Loraine Koski.

<sup>49</sup> Unit Journal, 508th Parachute Infantry, Operation “Neptune”, Normandy, France, 28 May to 8 July 1944. INRG-508-0.7; WWII Operations Reports, 1941-48; Infantry; Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1917, Record Group 407; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>50</sup> “Unit History” 508 PIR, <https://www.508pir.org/history/index.htm>, accessed 21 February 2020.

his body when he was killed. Additionally, it can be assumed trooper Chipman was confident he would be returned to leadership, as his former sergeants' stripes were also on his person. And lastly, a bible was found in his effects that returned to Mr. and Mrs. Chipman in Marquette.

## Reinternment at Coleville-Sur-Mer

In accordance with contemporary army practice, Roy Chipman was buried in a temporary cemetery in Blosville, France. Buried in a parachute shroud, Chipman was one of 6,000 buried in the cemetery, initially interred at plot I, row 6, grave 114. Minnie Chipman received a notification from the army from a letter dated 5 September 1945. This originally cemetery was approximated through the letter as being “twenty miles northwest of St. Lo, twenty-four miles southeast of Cherbourg, and



Figure 253: “Here, between June 1944 to 1948, rested 6,000 American soldiers, fallen for the liberation of France.” This marker commemorates the temporary cemetery at Blosville before the establishment of the American Military Cemetery at Coleville in 1948. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski, 2006.

five miles north, and slightly west of Carentan, all in France.” This cemetery remained throughout the decades following the close of the Second World War, until the graves of American personnel who fell in were consolidated to the current cemetery at Coleville, with the official dedication occurring on July 18, 1956. There trooper



*Figure 264: Trooper Roy Chipman’s headstone in the American Military Cemetery in Normandy. Photo courtesy of Loraine Koski, 2006.*

Chipman remained until 1949, when the department of the quartermaster exhumed and reinterred his remains at the American Military Cemetery in Coleville. Trooper Chipman currently rests in plot E, row 6, grave 17.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Roy Chipman IDPF, Courtesy of Dick O’Donnell. Unknown date of Publicaiton.

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Telling this story has been one of my most challenging and simultaneously rewarding endeavors of my academic career. Pushing the limits of my research and composition skills, I hope to add this biography to the greater human fabric of the second world war, adding one more recognizable face and story to the annals of American history, and preserving the story of this sacrifice for posterity.