

Reflections: When the Old Wound Aches

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By NELSON BRYANT

WEST TISBURY, Mass. WHEN the barometer drops, and a cold, wet wind comes out of the northeast, my old wound aches and sometimes reminds me of when my fellow paratroopers and I jumped into Normandy a few hours before dawn on D-Day 50 years ago.

For many years I exploited that wound, made less than a week after my first combat jump by a machine-gun bullet that entered my chest and exited through my shoulder blade. Until I was in my late 50's, I would contrive to steer post-dinner conversation around to the war, and then, if sufficiently unbothered by emotion and drink, I would tear off my shirt and invite guests to poke their fingers in the hole and aft indentations. There were times when I set fire to the hair on my chest to add a bit of dra-

Of war, heroism and the plain of life; a few second thoughts about D-Day.

ma to my antics and to better reveal the little entrance scar.

"Wear the silver badge of courage, drop like an eagle on your prey," the airborne recruiting posters had said, and the scars were symbols, albeit fading, of my having heeded that call.

Now having passed three score and 10, I have, I believe, put my participation in the Normandy and Holland jumps and the Battle of the Bulge in reasonable perspective. A decade ago, I wrote that taking part in those campaigns with the 82d Airborne Division overshadowed all that followed, including love, marriage, career and children. That is no longer true. I have belatedly come to understand that slogging across the plain of everyday life with dignity and as much honesty as one can muster calls for as much heroism, if only because the struggle never ends, as assaulting a flaming hill.

Were it not for the old wound aching, months could pass before I thought of lying alongside a hedgerow, condoms taped over the holes made by the bullet, trying to swallow some of the soup a buddy was serving me from his fire-blackened helmet, or before I again recalled the first German soldier I killed as he walked along a dirt road in Normandy on the birdsong dawn of June 6 not knowing that I had him in my sights from the hillside above, simply taking up the slack in the trigger and thinking all the while that the act was indecent, that it would

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American paratroopers pictured in flight on their way to landing sites in France on D-Day.

be justified only if he was firing at me.

A few hours later, that dangerous reluctance departed in a short, fierce fire fight that took the lives of several of my buddies.

THERE are also recollections of absurd encounters as when, the second morning after D-Day, I headed up a scouting patrol of three. I was given that task not because of my rank (I was a private first class) but because I had a smattering of French, enough to allow me to converse with the natives of the region. A mile or so from our own front line we came upon a farmhouse whose occupants greeted us warmly. The daughter of the household, a handsome, strapping 8-footer, told me that there were no Germans in the vicinity. She then asked if they could have the silk parachutes (she had petticoats and such things in mind)

that she had found in one of their pastures. I unhesitatingly responded, as befitted my lofty rank, that they were hers for the taking.

A big table was carried out into the dooryard, draped with white linen and laden with bread, cheese, cognac and wine, and the scouting patrol became a celebration of the invasion. I still wonder as I think of what could have happened during our garrulous, lurching return to our little redoubt on Hill 58.

My Normandy endeavors ended the following day on a patrol led by Maj. Shields Warren Jr. The single bullet that buried me in my back was one of a burst that rid-dled my fellow scout, who whispered, "Help me, help me," then died.

The patrol surged on, encountered more resistance

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Jumping Into The Dark

The **Isabel Bryant** — Company B, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division — was one of 13,000 American paratroopers dropped behind Utah Beach at about 2 A.M. on June 6, 1944. The goal was to gain control of the roads leading to St. Mere-Eglise to prevent German reinforcements from getting to Utah Beach, where American troops would be landing with the dawn.



Most of the paratroopers landed dark and alone, by many miles in some cases. Because of this, soldiers separated from their units banded together with the few Americans they found.

Private Bryant landed about here in the early hours of June 6. The first person he found was his commanding officer, **Lieut. Norman McVicar** (Liedman). McVicar was dangling from his parachute, hanging from a tree. Private Bryant cut him down, and they continued southeast to Hill 30. **1** The sandbagged pillbox for the 508th. They picked up soldiers, including some from the 508th, along the way, and by mid-morning had about 50 soldiers.

They made their contact with their battalion commander, **Lieut. Col. John B. Sherry**, **2** who had about 20 soldiers with him, and who had been under enemy fire one mile southwest. Highway to his rendezvous with Lieutenant McVicar. Colonel Sherry picked up 250 paratroopers sitting together in an open field, without an officer. They had been there 12 hours waiting for orders.

Lieutenant McVicar's forces stumbled onto those of **Major Shields** (Horn) at Hill 30, who was alone with the Germans. They ran up with the Sherry forces, and an German on Hill 30. **3** Where they spent their first night. Private Bryant is seen with a German in a series of reconnaissance photos. On a reconnaissance mission by machine-gun fire, Private Bryant was shot through the chest. The shot was fatal. The shot was fatal. The shot was fatal. A few days later, paratroopers picked up the wounded on Hill 30 and took them to a hospital on the beach. Those soldiers were later transported back to Britain.

Map created by the New York Times, based on U.S. Army maps.

