A MATTER OF PRIDE

By

Bob Fielder
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ROBERT A. FIELDER

A Matter of Pride is self-published
with a limited number of non-commercial copies.
To Betty

I am indebted to you, and offer my thanks for your hours of support, editing, and suggestions for changes that improved my book.

To John
Thanks for your interest, research, and writing. To your family, Susan, Jane and Robyn.

To Julie
Neil, Ann and Dennis.

To my relatives and friends.

This book is for them.
Dedicated to my comrades - in - arms, 
the brave troopers 
of the 
505th Parachute Infantry 
Regimental Combat Team 
who fought so gallantly to help liberate Europe 
in World War II, 
1943-1945.
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PROLOGUE

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the time that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Source text from: 14

In his book, An Army At Dawn, Pulitzer Prize winning author Rick Atkinson tells of the American military cemetery at Carthage, Tunisia and of a wall inscribed with the names of battles in North Africa where the soldiers buried there died in 1942 and 1943. Also inscribed is a line from Shelley’s Adonais, “He has outsoared the shadow of our night.”

In part Atkinson wrote, “We crave intimate detail of individual men in individual foxholes. The dead resist such intimacy. The closer we try to approach, the farther they draw back, like rainbows or mirages. They have outsoared the shadow of our night, to reside in the wild uplands of the past. History can take us there, almost. Their diaries and letters, their official reports and unofficial chronicles - including documents that, until now, have been hidden from view since the war - reveal many moments of exquisite clarity over a distance of sixty years. Memory, too, has transcendent power, even as we swiftly move toward the day when not a single participant remains alive to tell his tale, and the epic of World War II forever slips into national mythology.”

As the author has so compelling written in his book, I have tried in my own way to authenticate that history and memory give integrity to A Matter of Pride, to aver that all
this really happened. As Atkinson wrote, “But the final few steps must be the reader’s. For among mortal powers, only imagination can bring back the dead.”

This is about the paratroopers and officers I served with in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment who participated in the invasions of Sicily, Italy, Normandy and Holland. We also made a combat jump from the rear end of a truck in the Battle of the Bulge.

Some historians note that there were three costly American disasters in the European Theater of Operations during World War II: “Operation Market Garden”—the invasion of Holland; the battle in the Hurtgen Forest; and the “Bulge,” with its bitter, costly battles, freezing weather, snow and frostbite. Neither the Sicilian, Normandy, nor the Italian campaigns were noted in this category.

In An Army at Dawn, Rick Atkinson contends that the defeat at Kasserine Pass, Tunisia, “…may fairly be considered the worst drubbing of the war. From Fiade Pass to Thala, the Americans had been driven back eighty-five miles in a week, farther than the infamous “bulge” in the Belgian Ardennes, nearly two years later.” However Kasserine Pass, even though a disaster, proved to be one of the turning points in the Army’s ability to lead and to fight.

After Arnhem, Holland, I stood and silently watched with my comrades as the few Market Garden survivors of the 1st British Airborne Division crossed the Nijmegen Bridge returning from their bitter and costly defeat. Indeed theirs was the “bridge too far.” Visiting England after the war I had the occasion to meet and praise some of the survivors from the British airborne for their courageous stand at Arnhem.

Ernest Hemingway compared the conflict in the Hurtgen Forest to the British offensive in Paschendale during
World War I. The name of that area in Germany became synonymous with the needless slaughter of men.

Incredibly lucky, I survived all the campaigns and combat jumps without a wound or injury. There were so many times that I almost ‘bought the farm’ that to this day I wonder about it. Why? — There had been so many “good guys” who didn’t make it. It made me think of the phrase, “You’re a better man than I, Gunga Din.”

The fact that I was a communications officer, and not a platoon leader in a frontline rifle company, probably better influenced my chances of survival. However after two and a half years, near the end of the war, I did start looking over my shoulder. After the war, during one of the regimental reunions, Allen Langdon, author of the regimental history, made me an “Honorary Member” of C Co, the unit he served in. In talking to the survivors of that company, I found that almost without exception each had been wounded at least once and some twice.

In the 505th history Ready, Langdon wrote that, in addition to other factors, what astonished him most about the regiment, was “organized as light infantry, there was simply not enough transport assigned to the regiment and therefore it walked. For the same reason and the additional problems inherent in being airborne, it was rare when the regiment’s field kitchens could follow. Whereas most regular infantry units got at least one hot meal a day, even while on the line, the 505th subsisted on cold field rations, and when they weren’t forthcoming (which was often the case) it learned to live off the country, although that led to some very strange menus from time to time.”

Langdon continued, “To this day I don’t know how the regiment, in little more than summer clothing, not only existed, but fought a tremendous battle in one of the bitterest winters in the Belgium Ardennes. The regiment never had the artillery, armored or tank destroyer support that regular infantry divisions enjoyed, yet despite this
lack, it won every battle to which it was committed and most of the small skirmishes. The lack of heavy metal was made up for by bravery, teamwork and the skills of the individual men.”

As Langdon paraphrased someone before him,

“Where did we get such men?”

I was and still am proud of my service to my country and to have been a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division during WW II.

LEST WE FORGET

“The tumult and the shouting die; The Captains and Kings depart; Still stands thine ancient sacrifice, An humble and contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget - lest we forget!”

from Rudyard Kipling’s Recessional
The jumpmaster standing in the door gives the command, “Stand up and hook up,” then “Check equipment.” In turn, each man checks the next man with a slap on the back and sounds off. The jump master yells “Stand to the door, close it up.”

The first man pivots into the door, keeping his left foot forward with his hands on either side of the door. He doesn’t look down but instead watches the horizon. On the green light, he jumps free of the aircraft with head down, both hands over the reserve, turning left toward the tail counting out loud: one thousand, two thousand, three thousand.

A fifteen-foot static line attached to a cable inside the aircraft rips the pack cover off as he jumps free of the aircraft, pulling the chute out. The whole world swirls around as he tumbles over and over until jerked up by the opening shock as the chute blows open. If no opening shock at the count of three thousand, he grasps the metal handle on the right front of the reserve and pulls. It may be necessary to help extract and deploy the chute.

The noise of the aircraft diminishes; it becomes quite still and there is a unique feeling of freedom. With a slight oscillation and with knees slightly bent and feet together, he prepares for a landing. It is softer in hot weather with
a harder landing in cold weather, as the chute falls faster in cold weather.

You always hope for wind to your back and a soft landing.

THE PARACHUTE

On March 25, 1942 the 82nd Airborne Division was reactivated to become the first American airborne division to use the parachute, thus beginning the concept of airborne warfare in the United States.

Basically the early chutes were designed for pilots, creating a jolting, opening shock that snapped the head back and jarred the teeth. Later parachutes were improved, but still, the jumpers experienced quite an opening shock. Also there wasn’t a quick release feature and the jumper had to unsnap three hooks once on the ground. During the first combat jump in Sicily in 1943, gale force winds in some drop-zone areas caused troopers to be dragged to death or injured seriously. However a quick release was soon designed.

In parachute school, students initially learned how to pack their own parachutes and did so for their first five jumps. Packing took place in a large shed on long highly polished tables. The men first took off their hats, then their shirts, and stowed these under the table. The students were told that the top or the center of the canopy contained an 18 inch hole to let the air escape and to keep the chute from oscillating — or so it was claimed. Twenty-eight suspension lines, each 22 feet long, run from the canopy to four cotton risers. The parachutes had 28-foot canopies while reserve canopies were smaller. A later version with a 35-foot canopy was more maneuverable. The chute was stored on the pack in a canopy tray that fits on
the individual’s back. The opening time for the chute was not more than three seconds, thus permitting low altitude jumps in mass formation.

At each packing table, the men were given thin shot bags about 18 inches long, full of fine lead. This held the canopies in place as the parachute was folded and it was not uncommon during the daily qualifying jumps to see an occasional shot bag falling from the sky as someone forgot to remove it after packing the chute. One individual, who described the process of packing a chute, said the first one took him hours to pack, while the last one didn’t take more than a half hour.

Paratroopers today use a “steerable” parachute introduced in 1974 controlled by toggles and by a large elliptical cut in the rear of the parachute. These features enable chutists to steer clear of ground hazards such as trees and power lines. The chute has only a slight tug when the canopy opens and its anti-inversion net reduces the chance of a malfunction. The “steerable” chute has a forward thrust of 7 to 10 miles per hour. By turning into the wind, the trooper can reduce the speed of descent, softening the landing.

With the development of 100-foot parachutes, drops have been made with a 105–mm howitzer. Then there is the low altitude parachute extraction (LAPES) where palletized armored vehicles can be parachuted from a cargo plane flying about ten feet above the ground — quite a sight to see!

The Parachute School is located at Ft Benning, near Columbus, Ga, where the Infantry School
teaches and conducts Ranger training, basic combat courses and graduates commissioned 2nd Lieutenants from the Officer Candidate School.

During WW II, the parachute course lasted for four weeks with the requirement to successfully complete five static-line jumps. The training consisted of intensive physical training, hand-to-hand combat, rope climbing, practice tumbling, learning to pack a chute, and completing five jumps successfully. There was no walking, only double-timing and always the “Gimme 50 pushups.” Forget any letup in the double timing and pushups during the four weeks.

Hand-to-hand combat included the use of a bayonet and the technique of disarming an individual, with a partner hopefully of the same size. All this prepared the student for the mental and physical challenges that lay ahead.

The parachute school instructors, superbly trained, were in excellent physical condition. However this had a tendency to create an illusion of invincibility. In one particular case, an instructor who taught hand-to-hand combat ventured into town and became involved in a fight. Both men pulled knives, the instructor ending up badly cut with a trip to the hospital.

Rope climbing consisted of climbing hand-over-hand, up a 20-foot rope to the top of the shed and upon command, sliding down to the floor. For myself, experiencing difficulty reaching the final few feet to the top, I slid down when the instructor looked away. He assumed that the rope test had been completed successfully.

Platforms eight feet high were used to teach the proper body position when landing. Each man climbed up to the platform, put on a dummy parachute, jumped off and executed a left front roll, the next time a right front roll, finally jumping off backwards.
In one of the first tests to familiarize the student with height and exiting an aircraft, the student climbed up to a 34 ft. tower, put on a harness attached to a cable and roller and then exited thru a mock-up door with a free fall. The harness caught him as he slid down to a few feet above the ground, executing a left or right front tumble after releasing himself. Many disliked this first test of height from a 34-foot tower and often said they would have preferred to jump from an aircraft.

Four 250-foot towers were used so the student could learn to control the parachute in descent, two for a controlled descent and two for a free fall. Before using the towers, students put on a parachute, and then lay on the ground. A giant wind machine would blow open the canopy, dragging the student along the ground until given the command to collapse the chute and recover. Those unable to collapse it and recover were dragged along and had to start over until they eventually got it right. The trick was to get up, run towards the wind machine and then move sideways, pulling in the chute. Sometimes it took a couple of tries.

Finally the week arrived for the first qualifying jump, usually made at the 800 or 1000-foot level. Each student packed his chute, then waited to board the aircraft in a stick normally composed of 12 to 17 men. For many it was the first time in an airplane and the adrenalin started flowing as the aircraft gained speed as the pilot pushed the throttle forward. The ground slipped away as the aircraft banked, flying over the
Chattahoochee River, and then banking again to return and make ready for the approach to the marked drop zone — there would be no jump if the red smoke grenade was thrown.

Most students unable to finish the four-week course suffered broken bones and sprains. After each jump it wasn’t unusual to see a line of students seated on the wooden walkway to the dispensary, waiting to see the doctor. Some were held over, while students who couldn’t meet the mental and physical demands were dropped along with others who simply couldn’t overcome their fear of height.

At graduation, with the pinning of the wings and celebration afterwards, there were toasts, singing, and everyone telling about their different jumps. They had earned their wings and boots, the sign of a full-fledged paratrooper. What a proud moment!

**HOW THE DESIGN FOR THE PARACHUTE BADGE CAME ABOUT**

The parachutist’s badge, designed and developed by Lieutenant General William Yarborough, signifies qualification in the art of military parachuting. In developing the insignia, Yarborough wrote, “The most firm requirement placed on the Army on any design of a parachute qualification badge was that it in no way resemble the pilot wings of the Air Corps. The badge came into being as a result of Lieutenant Colonel Miley’s initiative, who as commander of the 501st Battalion, ordered me to Washington in early 1941, telling me not to come back to Ft Benning until I had an approved qualification badge in my hands. Arriving at the War Department, I set to work to produce a design, following the parameters supplied by the bureaucrats.

“After at least 50 tries, I came up with the design we now have. It seemed to me that the suggestion that the wing tips were supporting the chute canopy was symbolic
of powered flight, preceding the paradrop. Furthermore, the prohibition against extended wings (imposed by the Heraldry Branch) had to be accepted.

“I walked the approved design in and out of every office in the War Department which had a piece of the action. I would wait doggedly until each action type got to it in his ‘In’ basket, and then take it to the next one. When a contract was finally let with Bailey Banks and Biddle of Philadelphia, I camped on their doorstep until I was able to walk away with 350 sterling silver wings. These I carried triumphantly back to Colonel Miley at Benning. All of these bear BB&B on the back and they are collector items.” Yarborough explained that the wings needed a little color, so he designed a distinctive, colored felt background for each unit. He took a patent out to protect the design from wrongful exploitation and to keep the quality high. “I never obtained a single penny from the sale of the wings nor from any commercial use — this was not my objective.”

Prime Mover In Use Of Airborne

The prime mover in U.S. airborne operations was a non-West Pointer, William C. Lee, an old friend of General Matthew B. Ridgway’s. Following German airborne successes in the invasion of the Low Countries in the spring of 1940, Lee was able to convince the War Department to take some concrete steps. On June 25, 1940, the Department established a “test” platoon of fifty volunteer paratroopers at Fort Benning’s crude airstrip, Lawson Field, commanded by a West Pointer, William T. Ryder (class of 1936). This little group of brave pioneers, borrowing heavily from what was known of German paratroop operations, blazed the trail. By way of gear, it developed the standard Army backpack parachute (with a twenty-eight-foot nylon canopy); the “reserve” chest-pack chute, sturdy leather “jump boots” and cloth helmets with chin straps. For training purposes, it turned to a modified
version of an amusement ride, which had first appeared at the New York World’s Fair. This was the 250-foot steel tower from which the men were dropped with fully opened parachutes, simulating a landing. By August 16, the platoon was ready for the real thing. Spartan King became the first American enlisted man to jump.

Source: 1
AIRBORNE WARFARE

By 1942, the parachute had been around a long time, but its value as a military weapon had been slow in evolution. The drawing, attributed to Leonardo Da Vinci, clearly showed his vision of things to come. Parachutes had first come into limited use in the 1700s, employed by European balloonists as escape devices or for stunting at circuses and carnivals. An American, Albert Berry, made the first parachute jump from a moving plane on February 28, 1912. During World War I, when the parachute became common-place life-saving gear for balloonists and pilots, visionary planners on both sides proposed ideas for utilizing parachute infantry. On the Allied side, the noted Air Force (“Air Force” is used throughout to designate the Army Air Corps, which, in 1947, became the U.S. Air Force) pilot Brigadier General William (Billy) Mitchell conceived a plan to capture German-held Metz with a horde of parachute infantry which would be dropped into the enemy’s rear. But WW War I ended before his scheme got off the drawing board.

During the twenties and thirties, most of the world’s major armies experimented with airborne warfare. Two main theoretical concepts emerged: the use of small commando-like paratrooper units to seize key enemy objectives (bridges, etc.) ahead of advancing armies and the grander scheme of lifting larger regular infantry units by air transport into an “airhead” which had been previously seized by paratrooper shock troops. The Russians were the most innovative and aggressive pioneers in airborne warfare. In 1935, they electrified the world’s military establishments when they moved a division of infantry by air across a large segment of the Soviet Union, from Moscow to Vladivostok. In the following year, during war
games near Kiev, they created another sensation when two battalions of Red Army airborne forces (equipped with sixteen light field guns and 150 machine guns) air landed in eight minutes and “seized” their objective within the hour.

**Limitations of the New Form of Warfare**

Despite these sensational public displays, military experts recognized that this new form of warfare had some severe built-in limitations. Perhaps the greatest was the lack of a suitable aircraft for airborne operations. Military air transports of that era were small, slow, unarmed and vulnerable to enemy air or ground attack. In the United States, for example, the best available aircraft was the twin-engine Douglas DC-3, which had entered commercial service in 1931.

The military version, the C-47, enthusiastically mis-named the “Sky-train,” had a maximum payload of a mere six thousand pounds. Manned by a pilot, copilot, navigator and crew chief, the C-47 could carry only eighteen paratroopers or regular infantry with equipment. The paratroopers had to leap from a single side door in the right rear fuselage. To transport or drop one regular battalion of infantrymen required about fifty C-47s; a regiment would fill about a hundred fifty. Very large-scale operations would require hundreds or even thousands of aircraft. Even if such numbers of aircraft could be produced and made available for the purpose, it was clear that airborne operations would never be other than very expensive. Mass jumps proved to be very difficult. In order to maximize surprise, concentrate force and keep enemy counter fire to a minimum, the drop itself had to be executed with speed and precision theretofore unknown in the military.
Drop Zones and Weather

The landing area, or drop zone (DZ), had to be situated as close as possible to the enemy objective and be free of obstructions such as trees or swamps or open bodies of water. If the ground in the chosen DZ proved to be too hard or rocky, there was a good possibility that a paratrooper, weighted down with heavy gear, would sprain or break an ankle or leg on landing. The weather had to be nearly perfect. Too much cloud cover could defeat the pinpoint navigation necessary to find the enemy objective or completely obscure the DZ. Too much wind — anything above twenty miles per hour would dash a paratrooper into the ground or brutally drag him across it.

Aircraft

The planes had to fly in tight, well-disciplined formations, with no recourse to evasive maneuvers to avoid enemy gunfire, in order to drop the paratroopers en masse at the exact aiming point; otherwise, they might scatter the paratroopers all over the landscape. The planes had to fly very slowly (no more than one hundred twenty miles per hour) and low (about six hundred feet) at the point of drop to minimize both the opening shock of the parachute as it hit the slipstream and the paratrooper’s time of descent (when he was most exposed). On the ground, paratroopers had to jettison parachutes, collect gear and form up into cohesive, interlocking combat units — squads, platoons, companies, battalions — before the enemy (however much surprised) could stage a counterattack. Thereafter, the troops had to quickly move to the objective on foot, in strange territory, usually with sketchy maps and communications, and then launch a coordinated assault on the objective.

Finding the Right Person

Such complex and dangerous operations required an elite brand of soldier. He had to be in superb physical
condition in order to withstand the shock of the jump and the hard landing. He had to have nerves of steel. For most men, merely jumping from an airplane with a parachute required unusual courage. To jump from an airplane directly into enemy-held territory with none of the usual military backup such as tanks or artillery covering fire, no organized command headquarters or well-laid communications, no well-defined “front line” with flank protection and possible egress to the rear and no transportation whatsoever, required courage and resourcefulness of an extraordinarily high degree. To be sure, such men could be found in all armies. But if too many were siphoned off to staff elitist paratrooper units that might dangerously sap the leadership and readiness of the units from which they were drawn.

**The Need for Pilots**

A more difficult personnel problem proved to be that of recruiting qualified transport pilots. Most pilots had been drawn to military service because they wanted to fly fighter planes. Over the years, many switched, or were switched, to bombers; some with misgivings but many enthusiastically convinced that the bomber alone could win wars. Very few pilots had joined the military service with the aim of flying “troop transports.” Troop-transport duty was considered demeaning — the bottom of the pile and a career dead end. Moreover, flying paratroopers behind enemy lines in slow, unarmed planes was also very dangerous. As a consequence, there was no great rush of volunteers. Air Force leaders, reluctant to send their “best” pilots to troop-transport duty, often turned to the least-motivated pilots.

**Difficulties in Resupply**

Slowly some technological improvements were made. To increase the punch and “staying power” of the paratroopers, militarists devised techniques of parachuting (or air dropping) heavier weapons and extra ammunition to
the ground. However, in war games, air dropping did not prove to be as effective as promised in the staff papers. The pieces were usually so badly scattered, it was impossible to find all the parts in time to make effective use of the weapon. Follow-up aerial resupply required the same high level of precision navigation and pinpoint dropping as the initial paratrooper assault, with the added distraction of flying into the teeth of an enemy now fully alerted. It was a rare C-47 crew that could resupply ammo bundles by airdrop precisely where needed. All too many bundles wound up in enemy hands.

Use of Gliders

One promising innovation -- at least on paper -- was the development of the military glider. These craft, designed to be towed into combat by the transports, were nearly as large as the towing craft. The American version -- the Waco CG-4A -- was manned by two pilots and fitted with a swinging nose section to facilitate loading and unloading bulky cargo. It had a payload of nearly four thousand pounds and could carry fifteen soldiers or six soldiers and a jeep or a wheeled antitank gun.

The theoretical advantages of the glider were several. It could airland ordinary infantrymen, who did not require the long, expensive and complex paratrooper training, directly into enemy-held territory. It eliminated possible landing injuries which paratroopers were prone to sustain. It could put fifteen men -- a full squad down on the ground closely bunched in one place, eliminating the “forming up” delays of the paratroopers, and bring light artillery or antitank weapons or radio-equipped jeeps directly to the battlefield. Four gliders landing close together could disgorge a full platoon instantly ready for combat. Since some paper studies envisioned that one
C-47 fully loaded with paratroopers could tow one or two cheap gliders into combat, gliders could double or treble the effectiveness of every C-47, substantially reducing the requirement for C-47s and thus making airborne warfare more cost-effective.

**Glider Limitations**

In field tests, gliders proved to be far more difficult and dangerous than envisioned. Although the Waco version had a strong frame of small-gauge tubular steel and a sturdy plywood floor (the whole covered with aircraft fabric), gliders were structurally flimsy, unarmed and unarmored, and thus utterly defenseless against enemy ground or air attack. In the early days, some lost wings in flight. They were not difficult to fly, but having no power, once they were cut loose from the tow ship, everything about the descent and landing had to work perfectly. There was no “second chance,” no way to “go around” for a new approach. If a preselected landing area proved to be too rough or too small or too muddy, or if the pilot in his anxiety under or overshot, the result was usually a disastrous crash landing in a heavily loaded vehicle not designed to withstand severe stress. For these and other reasons, gliders would not be received with wildest enthusiasm by the American troops assigned to ride in them.

Gliding was a dangerous and thankless job. In training alone, from May 1943 to February 1944, there were 162 injuries and seventeen deaths due to glider accidents. Many more men would die when their gliders cracked up on the landing zones of Europe.

Looked down upon by the paratroopers, the “glider riders” were not issued jump boots or wings and did not
receive hazardous-duty pay like the troopers; nor were they volunteers. A poster designed by the glider troops that began circulating around the barracks explained their plight: “Join the Glider Troops! No Jump Pay. No Flight Pay. But Never A Dull Moment.” Eventually, glider regiments were formed and attached to the airborne divisions, proving their mettle on many occasions. Not until July 1944 would the glider men receive their well-earned hazardous-duty pay and the right to wear glider wings.

Text from source 1

**Thoughts of a Glider Pilot**

An unknown glider trooper expresses most eloquently what the thoughts of the glider men were as the time drew near for takeoff to Holland:

“Small groups of men sit under the wing of the glider. They watch the slowly rising sun as it climbs into the English sky. ‘It won’t be long now’ says one of the boys. That boy will be dead in four hours; he will never see a sun rise again. They will bury him on this same late summer day. A few engines far down the runway start to roar — checking their engines. How I hate the sound of engines.” Their nervousness continues.

“The glider pilot approaches and gives the word to get aboard. This is the one-way ride in a glider. We climb aboard and sit on wooden seats in silence. What are the folks at home doing now, Joe? Still asleep? This is it, this is the final payoff, and this is where the road ends, brother. It will be better than this when we are on the ground; it’s sitting around that gets a man’s guts in an uproar. Now the whole field is shaking with the roar of engines. We begin to move, we are airborne. There is no turning back, in two hours we’ll be in Holland - or dead.”

Lee Gillette of the 83rd TC Squadron was out watching the gliders and planes prepare to take off from Ramsbury, England for Holland. He could not help but overhear
glider pilot Haskell’s conversation with the trooper who will be riding in the co-pilot’s seat (there will be no co-pilot this trip). Haskell, in a few moments before take-off, was giving the stand-in co-pilot a hurried briefing on the intricacies involved in landing a loaded glider. “It’s a simple thing to do,” said Haskell as he waves his hands, gestures before the fascinated eyes of the co-pilot, “Keep your eye on the airspeed indicator, this thing right here. If you want the glider to go faster, then push down on the wheel. If you want to slow the glider, pull back on the wheel. Don’t try to make any turns. Fly at 60 miles per hour, and the main thing, lieutenant, pray for the best.” Doc Gillette said afterwards that this was the quickest briefing on how to fly a glider in one easy lesson that he ever heard.

“Scottie” Stewart, also of the 83rd, flew a glider on that fateful Sunday. His troubles began just after the IP (initial point) had been reached. Flak was coming up thick and fast and the tug ship and glider rocked as they tried to avoid the hot flying shrapnel that filled the air around them.

The eight troopers aboard the glider hung on for their lives as the glider danced crazily at the end of the nylon rope. Suddenly, a burst of flak exploded just under the right wing, putting the aileron out of commission. The glider immediately fell into a slip to the left and Stewart realized he had to release to keep from pulling the tow ship down, also the only open field was bounded by tall trees, but still this was better than no field at all. The glider reached the ground in one piece, but hit a tree at the far end — they were in Holland.

If they had planned for weeks they could not have landed in a hotter spot — 100 yards away was a German battalion SS Hdqs., with shooting coming from every open window. Two glider men concealed themselves under the outhouse just behind the SS Hdqs. until Wednesday night when they escaped in a light fog. By some miracle they
were able to swim a canal, but their energy was completely spent and the British found them. Nine men had flown from Ramsbury on Sunday, three men were still alive the following Saturday.

**Use of German Airborne**

Despite the glider’s considerable limitations, the Russian airborne warfare demonstrations of the 1930s made a strong impact on Hitler and the German General Staff. Hitler ordered Hermann Goering’s *Luftwaffe* to organize airborne forces. The task was delegated to a Luftwaffe colonel, Kurt Student, who had been a decorated pilot in World War I and afterward a glider enthusiast. He formed and trained three types of German airborne forces: paratroopers, glider-borne infantry and air-transportable infantry. When Hitler launched World War II, Student’s airborne forces were in the vanguard. German paratroopers first jumped into Norway to help seize that country. Employed in the May 1940 attacks on the Netherlands, paratroopers were particularly effective in seizing bridges over the Maas and Waal rivers in front of the advancing *Blitzkrieg*. Similarly, in Belgium, a small force of paratroopers and glider-borne infantry was utilized to capture Fort Eben Emael, a key fortress on the King Albert Canal. Later in the year, when Hitler was poised to invade the British Isles, the British, believing German paratroopers and glider-borne infantry might spearhead the attack, were compelled to divert enormous energy and resources to a defense against this possible threat.

**How the Battle for Crete Established “Vertical Envelopment”**

German airborne operations culminated in May 1941, in a massive assault on the British-held Mediterranean island of Crete. For this attack, Student, now a general, assembled a total of twenty-five thousand men, including paratroopers, glider-borne infantry and elements of two mountain divisions that were to be air landed after the
airfields had been captured. Unknown to Student, Crete was strongly defended. A motley collection of about forty-two thousand Allied troops — British, Australian, New Zealand, Palestinian, and Greek had been gathering on the island from various locations. Moreover, thanks to the fact that the British had broken some German military codes, the Allied forces had advance warning of the attack and deployed on full alert. When Student’s forces assaulted the island, on May 20, they were very badly mauled. The airborne forces suffered 44 percent casualties - three thousand killed, eight thousand wounded. Aircraft losses were also heavy — about 170 out of 530. Nonetheless, Student’s forces overwhelmed the Allied defenses, forcing the British to evacuate the island — another Dunkirk, on a smaller scale. About fifteen thousand British got away, but they had to leave behind some twenty - seven thousand dead, wounded, missing and captured. The outside world, not privy to Germany’s appalling losses on Crete, was stunned by this lightning - airborne “victory.” It appeared that Student’s forces had magically materialized out of the sky to pick off an easy, rich plum.

The “victory” made a profound impact on George Marshall and the War Department General Staff. It appeared to be a quintessential example of “vertical envelopment.” In U.S. Army eyes, Crete, more than any other single factor, “proved” that airborne forces were “here to stay” and led Marshall to initiate plans to field a substantial number of American airborne forces.

Ironically, Crete led to the very opposite course in Berlin. Up to May 1941, Hitler’s forces had never suffered such heavy battle casualties. Hitler was shocked. He called Crete a disaster and told the General Staff “the days of the paratrooper are over.” Thereafter, the Germans did not undertake another major airborne operation. Student’s
existing crack airborne units, and others created later, were held in reserve as potential threats, requiring the Allies to continue extensive defensive precautions. Later these elite units were deployed to battlefronts as regular “light infantry.”

Sources: (text from source 1), 3, 6, 7 and 13
1942
6 July  Regiment activated as part of the first airborne division.

1943
29 April  Sailed overseas aboard S.S. Monterey to North Africa.
12 - 14 May  Took 40&8s and trucks to Oujda, North Africa.
9 July  Made first night combat jump for the invasion of Sicily.
10 July  Battle of Biazza Ridge, Sicily.
15 September  Second night combat jump Salerno, Italy.
18 November  Departed Naples aboard S.S. *Funston* arriving in Belfast, Ireland 22 days later.

1944
14 February  Arrived Quordon, England as base for two invasions.
6 June  Third night combat jump for D-day invasion of Normandy, France.
CHRONOLOGY OF THE 505TH

17 September  Fourth combat jump (daylight) for invasion of Holland.

12 - 17 November  Relieved and sent to Suippes, a new base in France.

18 December to 10 February 1945. German breakthrough as Battle of Bulge begins. Regiment moves by truck to Ardennes Forest for combat in sub-freezing weather.

1945

30 April  Regiment crosses Elbe River, Germany in last phase of war.

8 May  Victory in Europe.

September  Men with 85 points rotated home aboard U.S.S. Mariposa. Those with high points move to Berlin with Division for occupation duty.

1946

January 12  Men return to U.S. and take part in the Victory Parade in New York.
THE SICILIAN CAMPAIGN

We Sail For Dusty North Africa

My recollections of the boat ride to North Africa and the desert training there for the invasion of Sicily are quite vivid.

The 82nd left Ft Bragg, NC by troop train for Camp Edwards MA on 20 April 1943 and then on to New York. We sailed aboard the U.S.S. Monterey for North Africa not knowing where we were headed.

We were the first airborne division to go overseas and had an escort consisting of the battleship “Texas,” an aircraft carrier and eight destroyers. The U.S.S. George Washington carrying the division commander and the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment broke down during our crossing but caught up after several days without further incident.

Arriving in North Africa at Casablanca, we docked alongside the sunken French battleship “Jean Bart” on 10 May 1943. Immediately the question arose, “Where is Rick’s place?” referring to the movie Casablanca. But that was not our destination. Instead we hiked in 100-degree temperature several miles under full pack and equipment to a two-night bivouac.

Then loading on trucks, while others took 40 & 8 cars, we drove to Oujda, French Morocco. It was a dirty little Arab town located a few miles west of the Algerian border and about 30 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea.

Oujda would be our first permanent station that proved to be nothing but sand, wind, dust and sun and soon acquired the name of “the dust bowl.” Training in the desert was conducted mostly at night due to the severe conditions. Encamping in four-man tents, we unrolled our sleeping bags on the sand and tried to sleep as best we
could during the day. Water bags with warm water spiced with Atabrine hung in the company streets. The daytime temperatures were 110 to 120 and in mid-morning, the wind would start to blow, covering our bedding rolls and equipment with sand.

Like many others I came down with diarrhea and a fever and was admitted to a tent-covered MASH hospital.

For celebration of the regiment’s activation date, we roasted beef by burying it in the sand with hot coals and stones. We had kegs of warm beer, so someone had the idea of inviting the pilots encamped at a nearby airfield to join us. We then loaded the kegs of warm beer onto the C-47s; the pilots took off circling at 10,000 feet until the beer was ice cold. Landing, the regiment and pilots had a dandy celebration.

**The Invasion**

**9 July-17 August 1943**

On the night of 9-10 July 1943, an Allied armada of 2,590 vessels launched one of the largest combined operations of World War II - the invasion of Sicily. Over the next thirty-eight days, half a million Allied soldiers, sailors, and airmen grappled with their German and Italian counterparts for control of this rocky outwork of Hitler’s “Fortress Europe.” When the struggle was over, Sicily became the first piece of the Axis homeland to fall to Allied forces during World War II. More important, it served as both a base for the invasion of Italy and as a training ground for many of the officers and enlisted men who eleven months later landed on the beaches of Normandy.

Preparations for Operation Husky, the code name for the invasion of Sicily, began immediately after the Casablanca Conference. With the invasion scheduled for 10 July, there was little time to lose. In drawing up the invasion plans, three factors dominated Allied thinking
— the island’s topography, the location of Axis air bases, and the amount of resistance that could be expected.

The final plan called for over seven divisions to wade ashore along a 100-mile front in southeastern Sicily, while elements of two airborne divisions landed behind Axis lines. The British Eighth Army would land four divisions, an independent brigade, and a commando force along a forty-mile front stretching from the Pachino Peninsula north along the Gulf of Noto to a point just south of the port of Syracuse. A glider landing would assist the amphibious troops in capturing Syracuse.

To the west, Patton’s Seventh Army would land three divisions over an even wider front in the Gulf of Gela. Parachutists from the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team and the 3d Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, would support the assault.

General Patton organized his invasion force as follows: On the right, Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton’s 45th Infantry Division, newly arrived from the United States, would land near Scoglitti and move inland to Comiso and Ragusa where it would link up with the Eighth Army’s left flank. In the center, Maj. Gen. Terry de la Mesa Allen’s veteran 1st Infantry Division, reinforced by two battalions of Rangers under the command of Lt. Col. William O. Darby, was to secure Gela and its neighboring airfields before pushing north to Niscemi.

Paratroopers from the 82d Airborne Division’s 505th and 504th Parachute Regiments under the command of Col. James M. Gavin would assist Allen by seizing the high ground north of the 1st Division’s beachheads and blocking the road south from Niscemi and the vital road junction at Piano Lupo. On the left, Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott’s 3d Division, reinforced by a Ranger battalion and Combat Command A of the 2d Armored Division, was to land at Licata and protect the left flank of the American beachhead. Once these objectives had been achieved, the
1st and 45th Divisions would drive north to Highway 124, the main east-west corridor in the southeastern portion of the island.

As the Allied armada steamed toward the island a fierce, forty-mile-per-hour gale, dubbed the “Mussolini Wind” by seasick G.I.s, whipped up the seas, seriously endangering some of the smaller craft. The situation in the air was even worse. Buffeted by the winds and confused by an overly complex flight plan, the inexperienced pilots ferrying Allied airborne forces became disoriented in the darkness and strayed from their courses. Of the 144 gliders bearing British paratroops to landing zones outside of Syracuse, only 12 landed on target, while 69 crashed into the sea and the rest dispersed over a wide area.

In the American sector, Colonel Gavin’s 3,400 paratroopers (of which I was one) were even more widely scattered. The wide dispersion of paratroopers seriously jeopardized Seventh Army’s invasion plan by weakening the buffer we were supposed to form in front of the 1st Division’s beachhead. Nevertheless, the men of the 82d Airborne went right to work wherever chance landed them. Operating in small, isolated groups, we created considerable confusion in Axis rear areas, attacking patrols and cutting communication lines.

The airborne forces had begun landing about 2330 hrs on 9 July, and by midnight General Guzzoni was fully apprised of their presence. He was not surprised. Axis air reconnaissance had spotted Allied convoys moving toward Sicily earlier that day, and Guzzoni had ordered a full alert at 2200 on the 9th. Based upon the reported airborne
drops, Guzzoni correctly surmised that the Allies intended to come ashore in the southeast, and he issued orders to that effect at 0145 hrs. on 10 July, nearly an hour before the first assault wave hit the beach. Nevertheless, the dispirited and ill-equipped Italian coastal units hardly put up a fight. Opposition in the Eighth Army’s sector was negligible. By the end of the first day the British were firmly ashore and well on their way toward Augusta, having walked into Syracuse virtually unopposed. Resistance was not much stronger in the American zone, and the Seventh Army had little trouble moving ashore despite sporadic air and artillery attacks.

The only serious fighting occurred in the American center, where Axis mobile forces tried to throw the Americans back into the sea before they had a chance to become firmly established. Meanwhile, at the vital Piano Lupo crossroads, those few paratroopers who had been fortunate enough to land near their objective repulsed a column of about twenty Italian tanks with the help of naval gunfire and the advancing infantrymen of the 16th Regimental Combat Team

The worst event of the day occurred when seventeen German Tiger I heavy tanks, an armored artillery battalion, and two battalions of motorized infantry from the Hermann Goering Division overran the 1st Battalion, 180th Infantry (45th Division), after a stiff fight, capturing its commander and many of its men.

American service troops performed herculean feats to keep the men in the front lines supplied and supported. An entirely new generation of landing craft and ships — LSTs, LCTs, LCIs, and LCVPs — greatly facilitated the logistical effort. Even more remarkable was the innovative DUKW amphibious truck that could move directly from offshore supply ships to inland depots.
By the end of the first day, the Seventh Army had established a beachhead two to four miles deep and fifty miles wide. In the process it had captured over 4,000 prisoners at the cost of 58 killed, 199 wounded, and 700 missing. But the situation was still perilous. Axis counterattacks had created a dangerous bulge in the center of the American line, the very point where the bulk of the 505th Parachute Regiment should have been if its drop had been accurate.

Several miles southeast of Gela, Colonel Gavin and an impromptu assembly of paratroopers and 45th Division soldiers effectively thwarted another German column consisting of 700 infantry, a battalion of self-propelled artillery, and a company of Tiger tanks at Biazza Ridge. By day’s end, the Seventh Army had suffered over 2,300 casualties, the Army’s greatest one-day loss during the campaign. But as darkness descended, the Americans still held, and in some areas had actually expanded their narrow foothold on the island.

Yet for all its achievements, the Sicily campaign also demonstrated some weaknesses in Allied capabilities, particularly in the realm of joint operations. None of the Allied commanders had much experience in joint airland-sea operations, and consequently the three services did not always work together as well as they might have. Ground commanders complained about the lack of close air support and the inaccuracy of airborne drops, air commanders complained of their aircraft’s being fired upon by Allied ground and naval forces, and naval officers chided the land commanders for not fully exploiting the fleet’s amphibious capabilities to outflank the enemy once the campaign had begun. Similarly, General Alexander’s unfortunate decision to broaden the Eighth Army’s front at the expense of the Seventh Army can be attributed to the newness of combined operations, for the decision reflected the British Army’s proclivity to underestimate American military capabilities — an attitude that American G.I.s proved unjustified during the Sicily campaign.
One consequence of this lack of integration within the Allied camp was that the Axis was able to evacuate over 100,000 men and 10,000 vehicles from Sicily during the first seventeen days in August. The failure of Allied air and naval forces to interdict the Strait of Messina was due in large part to the fact that neither Eisenhower nor his principal air, land, and sea commanders had formulated a coordinated plan to prevent the withdrawal of Axis forces from the island.

The escape of Axis forces from Sicily is also attributable to the conservative attitude of Allied commanders. They had opted for the most cautious invasion plan, massing their forces at the most predictable landing site. They never seriously considered the bolder option of launching simultaneous attacks on Messina and Calabria, the “toe” of Italy, to trap all Axis forces in Sicily in one blow.

Sicily was thus an important victory for the Allies, but not a decisive one. The Germans managed to effect, for the most part, a successful exodus of Sicily. The Allies would face them again in Italy. Yet lessons learned from combat operations during the campaign would serve them well in the months ahead, first in Italy and then at Normandy.

Sources: Text of Invasion from 6, 14
ATTACK PLAN FOR THE 505TH

Combat Jump In Sicily

On July 9, 1943, we got off to a rocky start when a violent windstorm at near gale force spread aircraft and troopers over the island of Sicily. Many men were in doubt that first night as to whether they were even in Sicily including our regimental commander, Colonel Gavin. One of the troopers said, “Imagine our surprise when we found we were not only in Sicily, we had only missed our DZ by about 30 miles.” In some cases aircraft were able, either by luck or superior navigation, to drop the troopers near their designated drop zones and objectives.

In the first days of fighting, in one of the key battles at Biazza Ridge, we were able to fight off and stop the advance of Tiger tanks and German infantry from the Hermann Goering Division.

Although the airborne battle had not gone according to plan, it had achieved spectacular results. General Patton stated that it speeded up the beach landings by about two days. Even greater praise came from General Kurt Student (The German airborne expert) when after the war, he
stated that if it had not been for American parachutists, the Hermann Goering Division would have pushed the beach forces back to the sea.

On Friday night, as number 21, I made my first combat jump. After taking off, we saw a long streamer from one of the equipment bundles unraveling underneath a C-47 flying alongside of us. The material, about 30-40 feet in length, was still there as it became dark.

When the red light blinked on, we stood up and hooked up and then stood ready to jump for more than an hour instead of the normal twenty minutes. Standing directly behind the pilot and co-pilot put me in the navigator’s lap. With gas running low and the pilot apparently lost, we got the green light and out we went. Never was anyone more pleased to leave that C-47 and North Africa than we were. As I exited the aircraft, jumping through a stream of sparks emitting from the spark arrestor as the pilot slowed the aircraft — almost made me think they were tracers. Landing without incident in a small orchard, I joined a group of others headed for Biazza Ridge. Other sticks had been less fortunate, landing in water just offshore with fatalities.
ATTACK PLAN FOR THE 505TH

The following night proved a disastrous one for the 504th, losing twenty three C-47s, ninety air crews, and an estimated two hundred twenty-nine troopers due to friendly fire from the Navy. The disaster occurred when the C-47s had been mistaken for German bombers that preceded them.

I had more close calls in the first few days than at any other time during the war and I shall remember them forever. Deployed along Biazza Ridge that dominated a secondary road, we faced elements of the Hermann Goering Division including a 60-ton Mark VI Tiger tank. They were trying to break through to the beaches - and we were trying to stop them.

Later after the war, General Gavin told us at a reunion that through the “Enigma” code breaker, the Allies knew about the presence of tanks in our area. We hadn’t been warned about them; otherwise the Germans would find out that their code had been broken.

As we moved along the ridge and looking down, I saw one of our troopers draped over the limb of a tree, quite dead — my first experience seeing one of our own killed in action. Suddenly there was an unmistakable loud, ripping burst from a rapid-fire German machine gun, followed by a slower rate of fire from our own. Never having heard the sound of 1200 rounds per minute I wondered what in the world is that? It took only a minute or two to realize the rate of fire from our light machine gun is 600 rounds per minute.

Running down the embankment from the ridge to take a position with the others, I lay prone, remaining there for most of the morning. The Germans started to use phosphorus shells burning the nearby underbrush. The fire soon died out, I wasn’t sure if I would burn or be shot.

At one point, the Tiger tank got me in its sights. Traversing, it fired a burst from its machine gun, and then
traversing again, fired another burst. The first one stitched up the ground inches from me on one side, while the next one stitched up the ground, inches from me on the other side. Traversing with lesser clicks would have cut me in two. I lay quite still so the gunner went on to other targets. Quite incredible, what luck!

Ordered back to the top of the ridge, we saw “Cannon Ball” Krause, the battalion commander, fire a bazooka, the shell bouncing harmlessly off the Mark VI tank. (Colonel Gavin during and after the war complained that our bazookas were useless against the larger German 60-ton tanks. He made it a point to have our troopers use captured German Panzerfausts, which were superior).

Two troopers using a small-type vehicle, volunteered to engage the tank. As they started down the hill, an 88 mm shell hit them, killing them both. When I looked at their vehicle, there was a neat hole, dead center.

A Naval Gunfire Liaison officer, Ensign George A. Hulton, attached to the 505th for support, for some reason decided to charge the tank. He was cut down and killed. Before the invasion, he had shown up one day at Regimental Headquarters Company, announcing who he was and that he would be jumping with us. Once confirmed, everyone took an immediate liking to this adventurous officer from the Navy who mixed so easily and was accepted by everyone. Not only would it be his first jump but one made in combat.

Members of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Bn. hand-wheeled a pack 75 Howitzer to the ridge, bore sighted it and fired several rounds that succeeded in halting the tank. As I remember, the battery commander received a Silver Star.

Our Regimental medical officer, a major, commandeered a truck to retrieve the wounded. Driving around the bend - I can’t remember if it had a Red Cross on it or
not — I saw him hit by the Mark VI tank, literally blowing him out of the saddle. It was a miracle that he escaped uninjured. What a courageous man!

During late afternoon, while in a shallow foxhole, we saw a shell coming towards us, bouncing along the ground. It slithered past and kept going — probably a dud.

About sundown, a shell dropped directly in front of me, burying itself in the ground without exploding — another dud! Others were not so lucky. Many brave men died and were buried that day by German prisoners of war.

The next morning, we drove around the bend and up the road for a short distance. We were greeted with the very grim sight of dead paratroopers hanging from trees. They had been part of a stick of troopers dropped the night before along the road on top of Germans who shot them as they hung in the trees.

Other recollections of Sicily include marching along the road and looking up at the Agrigento ruins far off, high on a hill, thinking of the times when the Greeks and Phoenicians were engaged in mortal combat.

Near the end of our campaign, we attacked an airfield held by Italians. As we ran across the airfield receiving small arms fire, I jumped into a small shell crater. One of my radiomen already there said, “Hey, Lt. you should get a Purple Heart,” looking at a little blood on my forehead. It proved a scratch so I forgot about it. When we finally over-ran the Italians, they seemed pleased to be captured so we asked why they had shot at us in the first place. “Only for our honor” they said. As they rode off under guard, they started singing. We almost laughed.

Later I climbed up to look into one of the several German Me109 fighter aircraft parked on the airfield. There was no seat as the pilot had to sit with legs extended to use the foot pedals.
With fighting finished in Sicily, a demonstration was conducted on the northern coast of Sicily to show the correct way to attack a pillbox. Seated on a hill, we looked across at a pillbox. A platoon-sized attack started with rifle and machine-gun fire directed at the slits and openings of the pillbox. Suddenly, certainly not following the script, a small terrier appeared out of nowhere. Confused, it stood near the front of one of the apertures. The terrier got nicked, gave a couple of squeals, and then with a loud yip ran off. The firing stopped momentarily with Col Gavin remarking that if it proved anything, there was always the chance of living through a hail of lead. Guess I was convinced - the terrier made it!

At the end of the campaign General Ridgway, the Division Commanding General, held a division critique. Attended by Col Gavin, other regimental commanders, small unit commanders and staff, Ridgway at the finish, asked if there were any more questions, of any kind. None were asked except by Krause, the 3rd battalion commander, who got up and said in a rather loud voice and in no uncertain terms that the 82nd Airborne Division’s staff had impeded his battalion’s progress because the division staff and their command cars had clogged the roads. For myself, as a junior officer it was all rather fascinating.

In the end, the Germans had fought a rearguard action and extricated themselves from Sicily but we stopped them from breaking through to the beaches. Through the initiative, courage and leadership of the individual, the mixed and scattered groups ended up accomplishing the regimental objectives.

On August 20 we moved to airports for airlift back to Kairouan, North Africa. On a bright sunny day, flying in formation, low over the sparkling blue Mediterranean waters an enthusiastic trooper in another aircraft chinned himself in the open door of the C-47. It’s hard to say what he was trying to do with this rather unusual exhibition
ATTACK PLAN FOR THE 505TH

-- perhaps expressing the pleasure we all had in leaving Sicily and combat behind.

Source: 5
THE SICILIAN DIARY

Don Adrianson assigned to the S-2 (intelligence) section of the 505th, kept a diary of the invasion of Sicily from 9 to 29 July 1943. Years after the war, Wesley, his brother, sent the diary to John Fielder, my son, and wrote that it had been “laboriously transcribed” by his father. “It is not a pleasant narrative and it is hard to read it without considerable emotional distress. I have promised myself never to read it again.”

John also wrote in A Matter of Pride about a patrol action in Holland involving Adrianson who wanted to prove himself.

The diary remained in my “what should I do with this?” file, as there were portions that tended to belittle some of the noncommissioned officers and officers.

It has never been my intention to highlight such observations, especially those made under the stress of combat. Sometimes these opinions change. Years later one trooper told me that he had changed his opinion of an officer while another still refused to accept an explanation from another trooper about his actions in combat. It seemed to me a case of bad blood, with their differences never to be forgiven.

The diary is a graphic description by a non-commissioned officer, educated at Georgetown University and fluent in French, of his first taste of combat as well as the first combat jump at night. Adrianson tells of his feelings when hearing about and seeing those killed in action, and how through ingenuity and initiative, he gathered information, maps, as well as weapons for the regimental intelligence section.

The diary is unusual in that few troopers in a rifle company had the time or the materials to record their experiences. Also there were regulations against keep-
ing diaries. Adrianson probably used the S2 intelligence section journal, jotting down his observations. Never published before, I thought it should be included in A Matter of Pride.

**BUD’S DIARY**

*By Don Adrianson*

**Friday, July 9**

I finish the last details on the sand table (a small scale dimensional effect in sand of the major roads, bridges, drop zones and key objectives in the initial phase of the campaign). McGuigan and Miller have nothing more to do but get ready. Everybody is calm about the jump and Col Gavin thinks it’s still a dry run. At 6 pm we go to the airfield outside Enfidaville (the east side of Tunisia along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea) where we get a book on Sicily, a letter from the Colonel and final instructions. Campbell, the cameraman, is nervous as I adjust his chute for him. He can hardly breathe as it his first jump, first night jump, and first combat jump. The rest of us are at ease, it’s like the rest of the jumps.

At 8:55 pm we take off, the air is choppy and we wonder how much ground wind there will be but nobody does much talking. The air is choppier when we get over the Mediterranean and Drysdale on my left gets sick. He vomits so many times he just sits on the floor; so many guys get sick the smell nauseates me. I’m sleepy as the devil from being up all night. It’s a wonder all my buckles are fastened.

**Saturday, July 10**

At 12:05 AM we hook up and by 12:35 I’m too sick to give a damn whether the chute opens or not. The flak rocks the ship for 20 minutes and finally we get out. Garber jumps right on the green light (Lt. Dean Garber would later jumpmaster the division commander’s aircraft in the Normandy invasion). There’s flares and heavy artillery pounding.
It takes a long time to hit the ground. I make a good landing in an olive grove I set out northwest and pick up Ernie Gee and Fitzgerald. It’s quiet except for firing in the distance. Ernie is nervous as hell. A little sniping and we meet McGuigan coming down the road, a beautiful silhouette on the white road, and he joins us. I take command when Gee doesn’t show common sense. We can’t find out where we are and Gee has lost his radio. At dawn we ask a couple of civilians where we are (in bad Italian). We think we’re 10 kilometers off (about six miles). A cyclist passes on the road and Gee yells, “Halt!” but gets buck fever, it’s too easy a shot. We get up on high ground behind the wall and get some sleep. In the afternoon we run into Becker with some 504th Division boys. One of them has a slug in his stomach and Becker doesn’t know what to do. I hang around because they have a machine gun and a bazooka.

Sunday, July 11

I get up at dawn – it’s too cold to sleep. Gee and I decide we’ll strike out alone according to the dope I’ve gotten from two German prisoners. Fitz goes too and soon Gee decides to walk through open fields, so Fitz and I skirt the trees and fences; stop at an Italian’s farm for some vino. We duck a sniper and machine guns, eventually meeting part of the 45th Division coming up the road.

We come across a wrecked weapons vehicle. I pick up a Mauser rifle and ammunition, a clean pair of socks and a German shirt. Pillboxes are everywhere. We hitch a ride up to Swingler’s (headquarters company commander) bunch of stragglers. Gillette tells me he just helped bury Tom Adams and McKeown. Patterson comes along, so he, Mendieta and Gillette and I take off for nowhere. We stop at a pillbox and try to get Lt Roh’s dog tags, but his body is buried under rock. We find a farm where for a 5-buck gold piece we get some vino and food.
Monday, July 12

We bathe in a brook at dawn, grab a truck and pick up every type of equipment available and haul it through Vittoria. We reach Col. Gavin’s command post in the afternoon and find most of the intelligence section is intact. They tell me Tommy Blake got it. Moderhak broke his ankle on the jump. Lt Sprinkle, a good guy, tried to take a pillbox by himself and got it in the face, and poor McGuigan has gone, too. God, it’s terrible. And Kerrigan and McCormick the supply sergeant, I was just getting to like the guy, too.

Meredith and I are eating K rations left and right. We were plenty hungry. I’m back on the maps for the Colonel. No word from Miller and Morris yet or Jerry Kamen, but Lt Weir’s dog tags came back. What a swell guy. The shelling goes on, but not too close, though Messerschmitts strafe us. Prisoners continue to pour in, mostly Italians.

Tuesday, July 13

In the morning, Pat, Mendieta, McCoy and I grab an Italian Fiat and go out on reconnaissance to contact the 1st Div. We take back trails to avoid trouble. I carry my German Mauser ready. We pick up Lt Mills of the 504th, badly wounded, and get him to a field station before he kicks off. Hope he’s OK. The boys everywhere are crazy about the Fiat, they ask, “Where in h --- did you get it?” knowing that we were the first troops to hit Italian soil.

The sea looks awfully inviting but we have to get back. We learn the Colonel already has contacted Division so we take the road back through the “Y” (road network). The road is cluttered with Mark VI’s and General Grant tanks, burned badly. A few enemy dead are unburied and the smell is bad. There are a couple of Americans, too — unburied. The number of pillboxes along the way is more numerous than supposed. Here is where a 88mm gun hit Col. Gorham, but his outfit did well. Water is getting more and more precious, but the K rations at least
keep us in cigarettes even if we’re not getting fat on the rations themselves.

**Wednesday, July 14**

The outfit moves again, this time on foot — there are no trucks save German and Italian salvages. Pat and Mendota go ahead to investigate a wealthy farmer whose hacienda has an antenna on the roof. Col. Gavin thinks he’s German. He’s a slender, tall, sophisticated gentleman farmer and we struggle along in Italian until I discover he speaks excellent French, so Louis and I discuss fascism in French for an hour with him, while Pat sits there like a lump of clay. Ignorant officer! The farmer seems to be OK so we get out on the road, bum a ride on an Italian half-track and catch up with the company. We bivouac with division hq in a large almond grove. The division command post is located in what was an Italian artillery outpost, an abandoned farm on top of a hill. From this point you can see the fleet off the coast, and the trickle of troops along the macadam highway far below. The regiment is pretty well together now, but we hope we will not be sent back to Africa — ever. Sicily is heaven compared to Tunisia.

**Thursday, July 15**

We hold an inspection of personal equipment in the morning. They tell us that Army headquarters is proud of our fighting under adverse conditions. What did they expect us to do - lie down and sleep? Some of the boys hike to the sea for a swim but it’s too hot and we are supposed to go on a march in the evening. So Louis and I walk a couple of miles to a shady spot along a little rivulet, bordered with bamboo. On one side a vineyard and the other a tomato patch, so we bathe, eat lunch on grapes, tomatoes, almonds and un-ripe figs, running around nude. There’s a distant rumble of heavy artillery every so often but we don’t know the war is going on. Six are dead with 22 missing in the company so far. Here we are only a few miles from the front, sluicing water over us with our helmets.
Friday, July 16

Everything quiet in the morning, so in the afternoon Davis and I head for the Mediterranean. We hitch two rides; still have two miles to walk to Gela (the port), keeping on the edge of the water to avoid mines. Barbed wire everywhere, boxes, crates, oil washed ashore, but we have a swim amid the debris. A leg with half a legging and muscles stringing after it, comes floating in. I lose my taste for swimming. One of the dead lies on the beach covered with flies, next to the slit trench he was digging when hit. Why don’t they bury the Americans right away? Some lay in the sun for three days until the stench is unspeakable. We meet Mendieta, Drysdale and McCoy on the beach so we all go up to Gela, though we know damn well it’s off limits. It is terribly hot, the streets smell strongly of human and animal manure, but it’s quaint to say the least. We wander all over; have lunch in a barbershop of bread, cheese, and wine while Drysdale has his hair cut. We leave the city limits, chat with some suburbanites and wander back to the road leading to camp.

Saturday, July 17

Col. Gavin, Gillette and I work on maps in the morning, consolidate reports, clean up our “map room” located in an abandoned artillery post overlooking the Mediterranean. They say Lt. S--- is now a Captain, cited for meritorious conduct, which most of us take very lightly. We know what really occurred.

The orders come through to move up, so in late afternoon, the S-2 sections go ahead in Italian trucks. We take the main road through Gela to Licata to Agrigento and drop off man by man to be road guides. I get off in Licata, gab with the M.P.s who try to tell me how the war is going, until I gently remark that we came in first and they shut up.

I stand with full pack on a corner directing traffic of our convoy through Licata for two hours until Lt.Col.
Batcheller (regimental executive officer) picks me up. We reach a spot south of Agrigento, underneath old Roman ruins, and encamp in an almond orchard about midnight. All along the road from Licata is the smell of decomposed flesh. God, I hope the world stops this soon!

**Sunday, July 18**

We have a wonderful breakfast of “mountain rations,” shared between five men that consisted of ham and eggs, bacon, graham crackers, coffee, butter, cream and dried pears. Boy, did it hit the spot!

Jack and I make a plan of the Agrigento area (for the situation map) after breakfast and the rest of the day is spent in loafing around, going through an Italian commanding officer’s desk, a Major Messina of 80th Coastal Defense Battalion. I find some nifty, highly detailed 1/25000 maps on this area that we take with us.

Prescott is not feeling so well. He volunteered to accompany Col. Ryder as an Italian interpreter (which he doesn’t speak). It turns out the Colonel wants to locate cracked-up planes and certain pillboxes, and of course, they are pretty grisly sights by now. He had to photograph everything. Maybe he’ll volunteer less from now on (Col Ryder, an observer, commanded the original parachute “test platoon” at Ft Benning, Ga and is also credited as being the first American in the Army to jump out of an airplane).

**Monday, July 19**

Now waiting around before we move up again. The boys wonder if we will get the transportation to catch up to the enemy. They retreat faster than we can keep up with them. We have a dinner of mountain rations and then get our stuff packed, ready to pull out on a moment’s notice. A demolition man, Gale, fooling around with a German detonator fuse, blows off four fingers and part of his palm, so they’ll have to amputate. Another one gone. I don’t know what gives them so much pleasure in fooling around with that stuff. We finally pull out about 7 o’clock at night.
I pull guard with Prescott. There isn’t much chance for sleeping.

**Tuesday, July 20**

About noon, Maj. Vandervoort, Jack, Nick and I start out ahead of the convoy on the road to Sciacca. We catch up to the reconnaissance cars and Col. Gavin jumps in and more or less conducts from there on. There are few pillboxes, little opposition, so we drive on. The streets are crowded with clapping and cheering Sicilians. They drop me off on the main drag to guide 505th trucks.

I stand there for a half hour when an elderly Italian grabs me and says he’s a citizen and needs some information. I see the local police are guiding all the traffic so I’m superfluous anyway Mr. Palmentiri tells me his life story and that of his charming wife, a former Lucille Mauro of Charleston, S.C. “We have been waiting a long time for Americans,” they tell me with tears in their eyes. I ask about the enemy and local munitions depot and they oblige. Back on the street the cheering still goes on. I go down a block to the Carabineri station. The sergeant and officer give me more information about the town of Memfi and treat me to cognac. The trucks haven’t arrived. I wait and wait, lay down on the pavement about midnight. The tanks running by about two feet from my head keep me awake. Strange!

**Wednesday, July 21**

At six in the morning I’m stiff waiting for the 505th trucks. In disgust I head out north of town to the bivouac area of the 504th, 2nd Battalion. A colonel there doesn’t know where the CP (command post) of the 505th is, so I head south of Memfi by hitching a ride to the 504th CP. They think the 505th is heading up towards Trapani. I go out a different road, hitch rides with the 2nd Armored, finally reach the front south of Castelvetrano. No word of the 505th, so I ask how things are going. Tough opposition, they say, but watching a battery of 155mm guns go
to work, makes this observation somewhat pessimistic, I think.

Some American dead on the road – pretty badly hit. I go back to Memfi, check with the 504th S3, and discover the 505th must be going up north toward Palermo. I ride outside an ambulance as far as an aid station. About two or three in the morning I find from the 504th boys that they had lost 6 dead, as many wounded.

Major Y-- handled the reconnaissance, and how! They tell me Lt. Patterson was here so I know I’m going in the right direction. I hitch a ride again and we’re up north of St. Margherita di Belice. The 505th has just taken the town. All along the roads walk groups of Italians, without guards, waving a white shirt at the head of the column. Hundreds and hundreds of them come in by themselves. Nobody wants them.

**Thursday, July 22**

Back with the 505th. Capt. S-- calls me over to him this morning. Seems that Maj. V-- is gunning for me again. I work with Nick on the maps. The prisoners keep coming down the roads on their own hook, with nobody wanting them.

**Friday, July 23**

We get the word we’re to move up again and everybody’s glad of it. I guess we’re anxious to move just to take our minds off the fleas eating us up. The Armored boys are crossing directly in front of us, heading toward Palermo and old Patton is ordering every other vehicle off the road. Our mission is to cut behind the 2nd Corps, head north-west and seize Trapani. We pull out at noon in a weapons carrier. It’s plenty hot and we sweat just sitting in the car.

As we pass through all the little towns, the people line the streets and laugh when we yell “Buena sera.” In Salemi they throw chocolate bars, apples and flowers at us. But as we near Trapani, it’s shellfire. We bail out, dig in and move
up gradually. We pass a demolished railroad yard and a wrecked Luftwaffe port. Messerschmitts and transports all over wrecked beyond repair. Pat tells me to read a German sign for him, “Flight Officers’ Quarters”, so I investigate and break into this big mansion via the second story window and search the place. Then pretty soon the word goes round and Van and the Colonel set up their CP there for the night. Prescott is stewed already on cognac he has found.

**Saturday, July 24**

The shelling on Trepani continues but in the morning the 1st Battalion enters the town. The 505th officers like the mansion so well, for its gardens and refrigerators, kitchen and toilets; they decide to take it over for quarters.

They bring in numerous prisoners and Mendota not being around, I have to address the officers in the best possible Italian at my command. I sweat plenty trying to interpret for Col. Batcheller, with an Italian colonel and major, but everything pans out all right.

Maj. V------ pulled a beauty yesterday they tell me – ran a jeep into machine gun fire, told Naty Keene to go in and investigate the nest – pulled away leaving Naty behind. After this campaign, everybody is getting out of S3 section! Rollo Morris showed up at last, bearing the news that Miller, Weir and the rest went back to Tunis. They’d been fighting with the British in southeastern Sicily. Red Townsend, he said, got it in the head. O’Neil was throwing grenades three at a time down there.

**Sunday, July 25**

Wandering around the “Fleigerhorst-Commandateaur” estate, I came across a subterranean chamber, break down the door and grope around in the dark. Only a sleeping quarters for a couple of Luftwaffe sergeants. They left most of their clothes behind, some Italian bayonets, documents, but nothing valuable.
Rumors fly around that we are going back to Africa, which is most discouraging. Nobody wants to go back. We now have almost all of Sicily, save the territory north of Catania. The enemy obviously holds it for evacuation. Ten thousand prisoners have been taken in the western sector, most of these surrendering on the fall of Trapani. The boys are highly disgusted with Italian soldiers and no wonder. When we pass them in trucks, they wave, salute and clap for us. What soldiers! Pat found some champagne in town and turned a dozen bottles over to us. We sit around polishing off the last of it. I go to sleep on the floor next to two fine portraits of Hitler and Mussolini. Nice bed partners!

**Monday, July 26**
Gillette, Gabriel and I spend the morning swimming in the estate pool with fifteen other guys, and washing our clothes. Boy, are they dirty, too.

**Wednesday, July 28**
We pack up and pull out of the Trapani area at 10 o’clock, moving seven miles back, just below Drillo.

**Thursday, July 29**
Somebody wakes me up at 4 AM to pull CQ and I hardly remember the next two hours. I just wrap myself in a blanket, more as protection against mosquitoes than anything else. Pat takes Mendieta and myself as interpreters into Trapani, seeking candles, maps, books, etc. We meet a Sicilian racketeer, former New Yorker, who obviously is a professional looter. He takes us around to various shops; all ransacked and looted to the last detail. We find nothing. Patterson is grumpy and quite jealous of his ignorance of foreign language when he’s with us. Mendieta and I laugh and kid with the Italians as we did in Africa. That evening I play the piano and get up a community sing.
INVASION OF SALERNO, ITALY

“\textit{I want you to make the drop within the lines on the beachhead and I want you to make it tonight. This is a must!}”\textit{\textsuperscript{1}}

Handwritten letter from Lt. General Mark Clark flown to Major General Ridgway.

The 82nd had been scheduled to make a parachute drop on Rome in September. At the last minute it was discovered that the Italians could not support the mission so the drop was cancelled, thereby avoiding a disaster and the decimation of the division. It was reported that only through the personal efforts of Gen Ridgway was the mission cancelled. The decision was such a close one that the Division’s chief of staff, “Doc” Eaton, said Ridgeway, who was not known for taking a drink, sat down afterwards and had one. There were tears in the General’s eyes.

The 82nd would see six different missions planned and then cancelled due to the changing battlefront. We were required to be on the alert and prepared to go each time. We could do nothing but wait.

With the invasion of Sicily finished, the regiment, together with the division, had returned to North Africa. There was not much change in the weather with temperatures of 110 to 120 degrees. The incessant dust from mid-morning to late afternoon coated everything. The poor food and ever-present swarms of flies together with the canned stew added to our misery. Whatever the next mission might be, we looked forward to it.

The arrival of Bob Hope and his crew provided a brief respite from the daily routine of intense desert training. The new replacements, who had been training nearby, made a night jump, flying low over the show and landing
nearby. They had time to fold their chutes and join us to watch and enjoy Bob Hope perform with his entourage. What a morale booster with his jokes and wisecracks!

While waiting for the show to begin, the troopers, always restless, came up with a new game — not necessarily condoned in polite society. Blowing up condoms and tossing them high in the air, batting them back and forth, someone would shout “ack-ack” (anti-aircraft fire!). Lighting a match, the game was to see how many hits they could make. About this time an officer would appear and in a loud voice tell everyone to “knock it off.” The game diverted us from the realities that lay ahead and would be repeated before Special Service shows.

The invasion of Italy, prior to the 505th drop, had started on September 8, 1943 on the beaches of Salerno Bay. By September 12, pressure on the Allied beachhead had mounted steadily with an attack by the Germans threatening the collapse of the Allied forces. Units were cut off and decimated. The first two days had proved to be a nightmare with German fire remaining intense and unabating. The 36th Division experienced heavy losses, forcing Lt Gen Clark to commit the 45th Infantry Division that had been in Army reserve.

As the crisis mounted, Eisenhower issued orders for all hands to render all possible assistance. The Allied situation had become desperate and those who were there said no man on the beachhead would ever forget it. It was at this point that Clark, alarmed, wrote the letter to Ridgway, directing him to order the Division into Salerno. An air force pilot flew the message to Ridgway who responded with two words: “Can Do.”
Lt. Col. Bill Yarborough (later called the father of the airborne) quickly improvised a way to illuminate the drop zone; directing that a drop zone marker be made with a “T” of lighted gasoline cans (with sand) with each leg of the “T” a half-mile long. In addition men on the beach would fire green Very flares and hold up flashlights.

On the 14th of September the 505th dropped with twenty one hundred troopers. (The 504th had come in on September 13). Fifty pathfinders were used with homing transmitters called “Eurekas” with brilliant Krypton lights, easily set up and operating in a matter of minutes. The pathfinders, who had been training near Agrigento, Sicily, were used for the first time. Due to faulty navigation, seven aircraft failed to reach the DZ.

I was aboard one of the seven aircraft that had become lost through faulty navigation. We were flying up the boot of Italy when suddenly an unidentified fighter aircraft appeared and briefly flew alongside. Satisfied with our identification, it peeled off and disappeared into the night. Realizing we were lost, the pilot turned back, heading for the base airfield. We rejoined the regiment near the Salerno beachhead several days later.

Because of the disaster during the Sicilian invasion when 22 C 47s were shot down by friendly naval fire, orders were given to the ground units and naval vessels not to fire on any aircraft after nine pm.

With the presence of the 504th and 505th in the beachhead area, the crisis gradually diminished and the Germans withdrew. Later troopers generally agreed that the Salerno jump would be remembered as the easiest of the four. With little or no briefings, the paratroopers were assembled within the hour and all the equipment recovered.

Our patrol from the 3rd Battalion, 505th made contact with one from the Eighth Army thereby closing the gap. A message to this effect was transmitted to Regiment and in
A MATTER OF PRIDE

turn passed on to the division. Because it was sent in the clear, Col. Gavin wanted to know the name of the officer responsible – not the individual who sent it. As I was the communication officer for the 3rd Battalion, I was temporarily relieved of my duties but for only a short period of time - nothing more came of it. This made it clear to me that an officer is held responsible for what his unit does or fails to do.

Entering Naples, we found it to be in shambles. The German bombers together with Allied bombing had completely destroyed the communications, electrical and sewage facilities as well as the waterfront. The latter had the appearance of a navy and transport junk yard. The railroads were gone along with the fuel storage tanks. Not to forget anything, the Germans set great mounds of stockpiled coal on fire and left booby traps with delayed action explosives. While the Army engineers cleared up the rubble and the harbor and put out the fires, the 505th was assigned the task of policing the city.

We were able to use government building for billets and had a roof overhead for the first time since leaving the States some five months before. The rainy season was about to start, so the timing was fortunate.

Shrapnel and unexploded shells became more of a hazard than bombs. Nearby Vesuvius provided a convenient landmark for the German Stuka dive bombers who arrived periodically at night to drop their bombs. They attached a device to each bomb that made a chilling shrieking sound. It was a real attention getter as it was released and headed towards its target. It always sent a shiver down my spine.

On October 7 a bomb went off in a requisitioned Army barracks in Naples killing 18 from the 307th Airborne Engineers and wounding fifty-six. Another exploded on October 11 in the
main post office, causing seventy casualties, half of them from the 82nd.

Before the regiment settled in, the regimental commander received orders to send two battalions north to the Volturno River to relieve units of the 36th Division and reinforce the British. The 3rd Battalion, of which I was a member, remained in the city where we assumed responsibility for patrolling.

After hard fighting, the 1st and 2nd Battalions seized and secured the bridges over the Volturno. Having attained their objectives the two battalions returned to Naples and for the balance of October and November, the regiment continued patrolling the city of Naples.

October 10th, General Ridgeway chose Jim Gavin as the assistant division commander, promoting him to brigadier general. Thus Gavin became one of the youngest generals in the Army. Gavin was replaced by his executive officer, Herbert Batchelor, who had jumped with Gavin in Sicily and Salerno. Gavin, later dissatisfied with Batchelor’s ability to lead, transferred him to the 508th. Batchelor was later killed in action in Normandy while leading an attack.

The Italian campaign finally came to an end for the regiment as we marched down to the harbor and loaded aboard the U.S.S. Frederick Funston. It was “Arrivederci Italia” as the Division headed to Ireland and then the United Kingdom where we began training for the invasion of Europe.

I remember the 22-day trip aboard the attack transport with a bad case of jaundice. True to its name my face turned yellow and I lost my appetite, missing the good food aboard ship and a real Thanksgiving dinner.

The Italian invasion was a controversial campaign that would cost the Allies some 188,000 casualties with 32,000 killed. Some historians would argue that it was ill-advised
as they maintained that Italy was knocked out even before a shot was fired. It was argued that the Allies should have gone over to the defensive at the Volturno River. However others including Churchill, Alexander and Eisenhower felt that the capture of Rome was a valuable prize and that it would divert Germans from committing more troops. Some historians noted that the invasion itself “was at least an ill-conceived, shoestring operation.”

Sources and partial text: 1, 2, 6, and 13
NORMANDY

Count Down

After a long trip from Italy on the attack transport U.S.S. Frederick Funston, we finally arrived at the port of Belfast in Northern Ireland on December 9, 1943 and were taken to Cookstown, a small village some 40 miles inland.

There the countryside with its lush green scenery, the beautiful women with their black hair and white skin and the friendly townspeople were a most welcome change from the Mediterranean countries. Even the rain didn’t matter, so there wasn’t too much of the proverbial grumbling.

With training limited due to the short days, emphasis was placed on physical training and intramural sports as the regiment began to absorb incoming replacements. Units formed up their baseball teams and matches were set up for those who liked to box.

The regiment started relaxing with passes granted to Belfast where troopers could enjoy a taste of city life. During a brief visit there, my buddies and I were not only introduced to Irish whiskey but also to the “black market.” Invited through the rear door of a large department store, some of us bought beautiful Irish linen tablecloths, which we sent home. It was the first Christmas for the regiment overseas and the troopers, many with an Irish lass, toured Cookstown singing Christmas carols.

Sooner or later the pleasant life had to come to an end, so on February 13, 1944 we were taken by truck to the port of Belfast where we boarded a ship for a short trip across the Irish Sea to the United Kingdom. We were transported to Camp Quorn, a small village in Leicestershire, England, the base for our next two invasions.

Lodged in four-man pyramidal tents, we endured the cold damp weather and considerable mud that proved to
be quite a change from Ireland. On occasion it snowed so heavily that troopers had to make sure snow was knocked off the top of the tent to prevent it from collapsing. Coke provided for the potbelly stoves initially burned unevenly, resulting in two temperatures: either too hot or too cold. Eventually a better grade of coke made the tents more livable.

Service Company provided trucks to transport troopers to nearby hamlets and villages where the popular public houses (pubs) were available; the odd hours of opening and closing always seemed a puzzle to us.

On March 22, the regiment got its new commanding officer, Lt Col William Ekman, replacing Lt Col Batchellor. While it would be initially difficult to fill Gavin’s shoes (the previous regimental commander), Bill Ekman proved to be a fine commander both in garrison and on the battlefield, earning the troopers’ respect for his ability and leadership. He changed the relaxed training schedule to a tough and demanding one that continued up to the time of the invasion.

The airborne landings during an invasion are initially vulnerable to tanks and continue to be so. While training for the invasion and to prove that we could survive a tank attack, we dug and crouched down in foxholes. A tank sitting on the side of a meadow started down the row of foxholes running over and turning on each foxhole. I took great pains to dig a deep hole, curling up on the bottom.

During March while the regiment was preparing for the invasion, I served on a board of umpires to grade the performance of the battalions during field maneuvers. Somehow during one of our field problems, the Rebecca units used to transmit signals to guide the aircraft had been placed in the wrong location that would lead the incoming aircraft away from the drop zone. Realizing this, I hurried through some underbrush next to an open-field drop zone marked out for the incoming aircraft. Who did
I bump into but Brigadier General Gavin wanting to know what I was doing. After I hastily explained, he sent me on my way to correct the problem. Later in June, when we had been marshaled and closed into the airfield waiting for D-Day, a messenger arrived handing me an envelope. In it was a letter of commendation from Major General Ridgeway, the division commander.

The regiment hadn’t made a mass jump since Salerno so when the weather finally permitted a night jump was planned. All went well until the formation flew into a giant cloudbank. Confusion and chaos took over. Some aircraft coming out of the cloudbank, seeing no others, decided to land at the nearest airfield that they could find. Others returned to base and still others thinking that they were in the right place went ahead and jumped their sticks of troopers. In some cases it took a day or two to return to their base with the regiment dropped and dispersed all the way to London. About a week later a regimental jump went off perfectly, but a tragedy occurred in another jump when two planes collided killing two officers.

In the meantime after much hard work, the regimental field order was finished and taken to division headquarters only to find that the mission and the drop zone had been changed. Again the staff burned midnight oil, completing the new field order within three days.

When the regiment was restricted and told to pack their gear near the end of May, we knew that this would be the real thing. Source: 2

Planning For The Invasion
Casting Doubts On The Use Of Airborne

Having participated in the invasion of Normandy, I find it fascinating to read years later about decisions pondered and decisions made by the senior planners on the use of airborne forces for this momentous undertaking.
In the planning for the invasion, it was readily apparent that the airborne had few friends. At times the debate would become somewhat acrimonious and even bitter. This included the senior commanders who were: Air Chief Sir Arthur Marshal Tender; General Eisenhower, the land commander; British General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, General Omar Bradley, British Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory and Eisenhower’s chief of staff, General Walter Bedell Smith.

For Operation Overlord, Montgomery was the overall commanding general. Bradley had the U.S. First Army and under him General Collins who commanded the VII Corps, was to land on Utah Beach; General Gerow, with the V Corps was to go in at Omaha Beach. The famed 1st Infantry Division, the U.S. 4th Division and U.S. 29th Infantry Division were selected to make the initial beach landings. This caused some troopers in those divisions to comment that they had already been in combat and taken losses - why shouldn’t another division go in first? They were told that because their divisions were combat tested, there was reluctance to use untested troops for the initial beach landings.

Leigh-Mallory from the very beginning took the position that the use of airborne forces was out of the question. He predicted 50 percent casualties for the airborne troops, and 75 per cent for the gliders. “If you do this, you are throwing away two airborne divisions - wiped out before reaching the ground.” Implied but not stated was the consequence that unable to carry out their missions, the Utah landings would fail, thereby placing the whole invasion in jeopardy.

The senior British commander, Gen Browning, had cast doubts on the ability of the American airborne, at one point specifically criticizing Ridgway for not jumping in Sicily with the division. Without saying so, he had questioned Ridgway’s courage.
In one point during the planning, it was discovered that the Germans had reinforced the 91st Division stationed in the area and, not only that, had correctly guessed the drop zone locations; causing panic. Instead of abandoning the use of the airborne, Bradley argued to change the drop zones, moving them eastward, closer to Ste. Mere Eglise. Ridgway, Taylor and Gavin were convinced that it would work. Ridgway later commented, “The drop was a great gamble, we admitted. The whole operation was a great gamble.”

On May 30, Leigh-Mallory, again determined to kill the use of American airborne divisions, called on Eisenhower protesting the futile slaughter of two fine divisions.

Stubbornly sticking to his belief, Bradley flatly stated at one point that he would not invade the Utah beach head without support of the two airborne divisions: the 82nd and 101st.

One issue that caused more debate was the prediction of unacceptable glider losses, their casualties and how they would be used. This resulted in a modification to the overall plan so the gliders would come in the next day (after D-day) and there would be no mass landings at dawn. The drop zones were moved eastward towards Ste Mere Eglise as Bradley had urged and because of the aircraft freed up from bringing in the gliders, both divisions could now be dropped at the same time.

In the beginning there had been an acute shortage of gliders. When shipped overseas the gliders usually were packed in five crates, weighing about ten tons. The personnel loading and unloading the crates were not that familiar with the component parts so often the matching crates were mixed up — somewhere else. Also when unpacked many proved unflyable, leaving fewer than 300 gliders. The attrition rate in the training exercises ate up the gliders as fast as they were assembled, so an accelerated program was started to supply more gliders, ending up with a
total of 910 with results that surprised everyone. A drastic shortage of crews of pilots and copilots had developed but the arrival of six hundred from the States in April and May proved sufficient to meet D-day demands. There remained however, a shortage for the rest of the war.

In all there were fourteen troop carrier groups with each group consisting of 52 to 73 aircraft. By 1 June the total had reached 1205. Twenty percent of the aircrews were inexperienced and had been overseas less than two months.

When Leigh-Mallory, the overall senior air commander, continued his attempt to scuttle the use of the two airborne divisions, Eisenhower later wrote, “If my technical expert (Leigh-Mallory) was correct, the planned operation was worse than stubborn folly, if he was right, the attack on Utah Beach was probably hopeless. The whole operation suddenly acquired a degree of risk, even foolhardiness that presaged a gigantic failure, probably Allied defeat.”

In the end, Eisenhower concluded that Leigh-Mallory was wrong and telephoned him to say the American airborne forces would go as Bradley wished. Later Eisenhower would say this decision was more difficult for him than his decision to launch D-day.

For Ridgway, Taylor, Gavin and many other airborne leaders, it had been a very close call, and would lead to an irrevocable and intolerable break between the airborne forces and Leigh-Mallory. Thirty-four years later Gavin wrote, “Even today I feel fury rise in me when I realize that Leigh-Mallory was going to have us left behind.”

The Invasion

A great invasion force stood off the Normandy coast of France as dawn broke on 6 June 1944: 9 battleships, 23 cruisers, 104 destroyers, and 71 large landing craft of various descriptions as well as troop transports, mine sweepers, and merchantmen — in all, nearly 5,000 ships of
every type, the largest armada ever assembled. The naval bombardment that began at 0550 that morning detonated large minefields along the shoreline and destroyed a number of the enemy’s defensive positions. To one correspondent, reporting from the deck of the cruiser *HMS Hillary*, it sounded like “the rhythmic beating of a gigantic drum” all along the coast. In the hours following the bombardment, more than 100,000 fighting men swept ashore to begin one of the epic assaults of history, “a mighty endeavor,” as President Franklin D. Roosevelt described it to the American people, “to preserve ... our civilization and to set free a suffering humanity.” The attack had been long in coming. From the moment British forces had been forced to withdraw from France in 1940 in the face of an overwhelming German onslaught, planners had plotted a return to the Continent. Only in that way would the Allies be able to confront the enemy’s power on the ground, liberate northwestern Europe, and put an end to the Nazi regime.

The British viewed the situation in Europe with an eye closely focused on their own circumstances and experience. As conscious of their nation’s lack of resources as the Americans were of the vast wealth available to the United States, they had already withstood a disaster at Dunkerque
in 1940, when the Germans had driven a British army off the Continent in defeat, and at the French seacoast town of Dieppe in August 1942, when the Germans, at great cost to the Allies, had repelled a Canadian landing. Their experiences with amphibious warfare during World War I had been little better. Their forces had endured a bloodletting at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles, where landings championed by Churchill had failed. They had also lost an entire generation of young men to trench warfare on the stalemated Western Front in France. Britain’s leaders thus had visions of catastrophe whenever the Americans raised the issue of a cross-Channel attack. If haste prevailed over reason, Churchill warned, the beaches of France might well be “choked with the bodies of the flower of American and British manhood.”

The vehement German response to the assault at Dieppe, resulting in the loss of nearly a thousand British and Canadian lives, the capture of more than two thousand fighting men, and the destruction of better than one hundred aircraft, weighed heavily upon American planners. If the German response at Dieppe was any indication, an invasion of the Continent would require more meticulous preparation and more strength than a 1943 attack could possibly allow (the attack had been proposed for that year). Indeed, Allied planners and logisticians would have to create, field, and supply an organization that could meet and defeat the worst counterattack the enemy was capable of devising.

Sources: Partial text of Casting Doubts to The Invasion from 1, 14

The 505th Role in the Invasion

On May 29, 1944 we loaded aboard busses and by early afternoon were sealed in at the two departure airfields near Leicester with billets in immense hangars. The occasional rain made little difference. Briefings began immediately where we learned for the first time that Normandy would be our destination.
The 3rd Battalion was given the most difficult regimental mission, the capture of Ste Mere Eglise. It was a key juncture inland from Utah beach and known to be occupied by German troops. The 2nd Battalion was to seize a small village about two miles north of Ste Mere Eglise and thus be able to provide a blocking position. The 1st Battalion was in regimental reserve and was to clear the drop zones. A Co was directed to seize and hold the bridge at Manoir La Fiere, also providing a blocking force from Germans crossing the river.

In the marshalling area, troopers received a basic load of 160 rounds of armor-piercing ammo and two fragmentation grenades. Ammo and the crew-served weapons were secured in an equipment chute hooked up under the aircraft along with the other bundles and tied together to insure they landed in the same place. The Gammon grenade was issued to everyone for use by the 505th for the first time. It had been invented in 1942 and consisted of two pounds of plastic explosive (composition C), a stockinet, and detonator. We molded the plastic explosive
into the shape of a soft ball, stuffing it into a stockinet and then inserting the detonator. To throw it you had to be fairly close for accuracy. With the detonator activated, the impact detonated the explosive. Its affinity to steel could knock out or damage a German tank. Also the troopers learned that a little piece of composition C stuck on the canteen and lighted burned with such intensity that it heated up water quickly for a good cup of instant coffee.

A Griswold container for the M1 rifle was issued to those who wanted it. Some preferred not to, as it would take time to assemble the rifle after hitting the ground, a very vulnerable moment.

Also issued was a child’s toy cricket with instructions that it could be used in lieu of the normal challenge and password. With some amusement, we put it in our bag but later it proved to be a good idea when some realized that they had forgotten the password.

Rations were issued consisting of one unit of “K” ration and two of “D” units, just barely enough to keep us going for three days.

The 316th Troop Carrier Group would carry the 2nd and 3rd Battalion from Cottesmore while the 315th would drop the 1st Battalion and Regimental Headquarters, of which I was a member. The standard number of 36 C-47s would carry each Battalion. At the last minute waiting for takeoff, a Gammon grenade, detonated by accident, destroyed one aircraft, killing two troopers.

Ridgway parachuted into Normandy successfully landing in the right spot. His aircraft had been placed on the right hand side of the serial where Dean Garber, the jumpmaster, a friend of mine in regimental headquarters company, had a good view of the Pathfinder lights as they came into view.

The invasion was postponed for 24 hours due to bad weather but on Monday June 5th it was announced that
the invasion was definitely on for that night. We went about our final preparations with knowledge that this day could be the last for some of us.

After a final briefing, we walked to our designated aircraft (some were trucked due to the distance) where we had a close up view of the white stripes painted on the wings for positive identification. As daylight began to fade at 1000 pm, the command was given, “let’s chute up.” There was still time for a quick trip to the rear of the aircraft for relief - not the easiest thing to do with all the gear. Then pulling and pushing, each of us struggled up the boarding ladder into the aircraft. Taking a bucket seat on the aluminum benches running parallel to the aircraft, we settled back and awaited the arrival of the pilot and crew. If the pilot had a beard and appeared to be 30 we were satisfied but if the pilot was younger or the same age as we were, there was the inevitable comment, “oh s--- look what we got.”

As it became dark, with the twilight turning into night, the engines started, producing a thunderous and almost discordant roar that could be heard for miles. Each aircraft lurched its way into line on the taxi strip. Upon reaching the head of the runway, the pilot locked brakes and proceeded to run the engines up into a high pitch. Then with about ten second intervals, the brakes were released and the aircraft started down the runway, slowly at first, but gathering speed, as one by one we lifted off into the gloom. It was approximately 1100 pm, June 5th, 1944.

_We were once again airborne and on our way into battle._

**Pathfinders**

Following the drop in Sicily where the units were widely dispersed over most of the island, it became readily apparent that a better way had to be found to guide the aircraft
to the designated drop zones. The dispersal in Sicily had been so bad that some of the unit commanders told the pilots or squadron leaders that if they were going to be dropped in the wrong place, to please drop them all in the same place.

So began the use of volunteer pathfinder teams taken from the three battalions in the regiment. For the Normandy invasion, the pathfinders trained with a special unit of the IX Troop Carrier Command. The 505th team comprised three planeloads of 18 men each. Each battalion had nine men who had extensive training in setting up and operating the “Eureka” radar beacon that sent the signals to the aircraft and special Holophane lights to mark the drop zones. One man was trained to operate the transmitter for the automatic direction finder radio with the additional men providing security.

The pilot of the lead plane of the pathfinder teams navigated on a British radio system called “Gee.” The aircraft received three widely separated radio pulses from ground transmitters in England. These signals were then checked against “lattice” lines in the aircraft that covered all of northwest Europe within 100 miles of the English coast.

The aircraft serial taking off, flew the length of England then out over the ocean. Crossing the channel, clearing the last checkpoint, the lead plane began to operate on “Gee.” The lead plane made landfall at exactly the “Initial Point” and set a course for Drop Zone “O” just outside of Ste Mere Eglise. The serial had drifted somewhat, so the pilot finding his position on the “Lattice,” corrected the course and flew directly to the DZ. This occurred despite some antiaircraft fire coming up from Ste. Mere Eglise. The three battalion teams were given the green light and hit the DZ near dead center. Within ten minutes the teams set up their “Eureka.” The incoming serials carrying the regiment began to pick up the “Eureka” signals about 15 to 20 miles away.Shortly thereafter the “Ts” were lighted up.
There was every expectation that the regiment would land as planned on DZ “O.”

**The Cross Channel Flight And The Drop**

Dropping two American airborne divisions behind enemy lines in support of Bradley’s Utah beachhead, required intensive planning that covered allocation of aircraft, designation of airbases, establishing routes and timetables to cross the channel and finding the drop zone.

First to go was the 101st, to be lifted in 10 serials with the 82nd following in ten more serials that would include 119 C-47s lifting the 505th. The 82nd had about 100 more miles to go, so to join the armada in the correct sequence, the takeoff times were scheduled so as not to over fly the 101st.

Starting in England, a precise land route was laid out with aerial beacons every ten miles. Then after leaving the last checkpoint in England, the serials headed out to sea traveling for 29 ½ miles where a British patrol boat marked their path, then for 29 miles to the last checkpoint, marked by a British submarine. Reaching the “Initial Point” on the west side of Normandy, the serials flew 20 ½ miles to drop zone “O,” a large oval area about a mile long, northwest of Ste Mere Eglise. Checkpoints were easily discernible but the Merderet River proved puzzling. Initial photoreconnaissance and maps had shown it as a river meandering through the countryside. Instead in the moonlight below it appeared to be a vast swampland. The Germans had flooded the entire river basin.

The 505th serials dropped down to 500 feet to avoid radar detection but after clearing the last checkpoint they slowly climbed to 1500 feet. Initially the countryside below appeared peaceful but this began to change as tracers started to curve upward as they neared Ste. Mere Eglise.

Then the vagaries of weather took over when the first serial sighted a huge fog bank ahead that extended across
the peninsula for a distance of approximately 12 to 15 miles. Seeing this, they climbed above it and arrived over the drop zone in fairly good formation. It proved to be an advantage as the clouds hid them from the German batteries that did not fire until shortly before the drop zone was reached. But a bigger problem developed because the planes were approximately at 2000 feet and traveling at excessive speeds. At that height individuals were landing strung out on the ground, causing difficulty assembling quickly. The increase in speed caused considerable harm to the troops who sustained big red bruises called “cherries” from the opening shock and had their equipment torn off. Col. Ekman, the regimental commander, was knocked unconscious and lay on the ground for considerable time before he could gather his senses.

Each of the following serials encountered more and more flack as the German batteries began to realize what was happening. Twenty-three aircraft were hit, mostly in the last two serials, but all returned to England safely.

Shortly after midnight the British 6th Airborne Division dropped northeast of Caen, near the mouth of the Orne River, where it anchored the British eastern flank by securing bridges over the river and the Caen Canal.

Some of our American airborne troops came to ground near their objectives, but most were scattered over a wide area. A number drowned in the flooded lowlands. Others landed in the midst of German positions, where they were killed or captured. In the hours that followed, nevertheless, paratroopers from the 101st succeeded in clearing much of the way for VII Corps’ move inland. The 3d battalion, 505th, captured Ste. Mere-Eglise and cut the main enemy communications cable to Cherbourg.

I jumped number two in a stick of twenty troopers. We had six equipment bundles hung under the aircraft. Receiving our final briefings, everyone shook hands and climbed aboard. Indeed it was a momentous and exciting
moment in our lives so there wasn’t much conversation. Our aircraft headed out and upon reaching the Normandy coast the jumpmaster, our company commander, had us stand up and hook up in case a hasty exit became necessary. Standing and looking around his shoulder, we saw another flight of aircraft in a V of V’s crossing beneath us, at some distance away. This wasn’t exactly a morale booster but as they disappeared — to where I don’t know, we forgot them and prepared for our jump.

The red light blinked on, then 20 minutes later the pilot gave us the green light. I made a good exit, landing in the backyard of a small farmhouse. It was quiet with no firing nearby. No one appeared from the farmhouse so I proceeded to take off my chute, gather up my gear and join others from another stick of troopers on our way in search of our command post.

Then the star shells used by the aircraft started to light up the countryside for the bombers. This was followed by the awesome sound of exploding bombs and concussions from the 16” shells. Fired by cruisers for ground support, the noise as they passed overhead, resembled that of a fast freight train with the shells digging deep craters, stunning cattle grazing nearby. Years later, watching the movie “Apocalypse Now” I was reminded of this night. At dawn the sound of gliders landing was like that of a 75mm shell as the gliders hit the trees. As we continued on our way we saw wrecked gliders with the dead inside and on the ground. Other units moved quietly by in file on the way to their objective.

It is interesting to note that while hedgerows initially presented an imposing obstacle for the airborne in its battles, months later tankers had learned how to fight in the bocage, finding a way to cross the hedgerows without exposing their vehicles’ vulnerable undersides to enemy fire. With huge iron teeth salvaged from German beach obstacles welded to the fronts of hundreds of tanks, they
began to bull their way through the hedgerows, taking hours to advance through obstacles that would earlier have required days of fighting to overcome. From then on, the “Rhinos”, as the men named them, became an invaluable asset.

For several days in Normandy, one of the worst storms in 20 years swept across the channel, forcing the delay of infantry units reaching us as well as our resupply. In the regimental command post we were asked to hand over all our ammo, except a clip or two, for units on the perimeter.

On one occasion, a P-47 fighter aircraft flying close-air support came in to strafe but mistakenly, due to the fluid situation, hit our positions first. I looked over at a nearby trooper, when his rifle snapped in two from a 50 cal. bullet. We immediately threw red smoke flares. Some one down the line hollered, “What’s the matter, why are the P-47s strafing us and dropping leaflets on the Germans?”

Once, strafed by a German ME 109 fighter, Lt. Tom McKeage crouching in his foxhole quoted a Star & Stripes article shouting, “It says here that we have air superiority.” We did laugh.

The regimental commo officer, Captain Boyd asked me to visit his foxhole one morning during a lull in the fighting. The regiment or division thought that it would be a good idea to try some psychological warfare on the Germans. It had been learned that there were a mix of Russian Georgians in the units facing us. For this reason it was thought that they might be persuaded to give up and end their fighting. How was this going to be done? Because I was the platoon leader of the communication platoon, I would take a loud speaker out to “no man’s land” and withdraw. I crawled on my belly pushing the loudspeaker in front of me with the wires trailing out behind – it was fairly large, really didn’t blend in with terrain. Expecting a barrage of small arms any minute, much to my relief
nothing happened. Several days later I retrieved it without incident. I was told that I presented a strange sight pushing a loudspeaker through the terrain.

Attacking Hill 131 that dominated the area, the regimental command post was placed on the line of departure (where the units jump off for the attack). Lt Dwyer and I got down in a large shell crater that had been further excavated, waiting for the incoming enemy fire as the attack started, and in it came!

The Germans have an 88 mm (3.52” bore) anti-aircraft gun that they like to depress and use to snipe like a rifle against ground troops. It had been raining and the ground was muddy. Bob Dwyer and I grabbed mud, telling each other that if we ever got out of this we would never complain about anything the rest of our lives. Those 88s absolutely tore the place up and it seemed like the shells were close enough to crease our scalps. There was a crack, explosion and boom (the boom in the distance is the 88 mm firing and is heard after the overhead crack and explosion of the shell — with rifle bullets, it’s crack, crack — boom, boom). It’s something to think about.

Bradley’s Utah Beach head had been saved, insuring the success of the invasion. What was the cost? Of the nearly 12000 men of the 82nd in Normandy, about 46 per cent (5245) were casualties to include killed in action, wounded and missing. When the division embarked for their return to England there were 6345 officers and men.

“It was then that Rommel told his son the future was clear and inevitable. The end of Hitler’s Reich was at hand: “There is no longer anything we can do.”

Along with the other 505th veterans who had been evacuated, two out of four senior commanders were lost but the battalion commanders took the biggest hit for any division in a single campaign with a 50 per cent loss.
I attended the 50th anniversary D-day memorial services on June 6, 1994 held on Omaha beach. Both President Clinton and French Premier Mitterand arrived amidst a big fanfare from the band. Each paraded past the grandstands accompanied by his entourage that included soldiers, politicians, and secret service with guard dogs.

Later visiting the beautiful, dignified and peaceful American cemetery in Normandy, I remember seeing the words inscribed there in marble:

“To you from failing hands, we throw the torch, be yours to hold it high.”

We also visited the German cemetery which reflected the same dignity as the American.

My wife and I will always remember the services held on this special day.

Sources: 2, 13 and partial text from 1
D-DAY PARACHUTE MANIFEST

Below is the loading manifest with the order of drop for the D-day invasion showing Spanhoe, England as the airfield for departure. The manifest shows the aircraft tail number and chalk number with the designation as plane number six. The bundles are dropped when the man in middle of the stick hits the trip bar by the door as he exits. I jumped number two.

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A MATTER OF PRIDE

Normandy, France
June 4, 1944

There were 11-12 divisions for the initial invasion on D-day.

(1) Omaha Beach - 1st Div.

(2) Utah Beach - 4th and 29th Div.

The 82nd and 101st dropped behind Utah beach to secure roads and junctions inland for the incoming invasion forces.

(3) Sword Beach - 3d British and 51st Highlanders Division.

(4) Juno Beach - 3d Canadian Division.

(5) Gold Beach - 50th British, 49th Division.

(6) Other - Two British Airborne Divisions, 9th Armored Division.

Navy

There were 9 battleships – 23 cruisers – 104 destroyers – 71 landing craft for a total of 5000 ships and 100,000 men that swept ashore.

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D-DAY PARACHUTE MANIFEST

C-47 Estimated Aircraft Requirements
Per battalion 36-50          Per division 369-450
Per regiment 117-150         Four divisions 1476-1800

Source: 1,6, author's files
A LETTER FROM GENERAL RIDGWAY

Below is a letter of commendation from Matthew B. Ridgway, Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division. I received it at an airfield in England several days before taking off for the Normandy invasion.

Ridgway, a four star general, later commanded the United Nations forces Eighth Army in Korea when President Truman fired General MacArthur. Ridgway successfully turned a defeated and broken army around, transforming it into a fine fighting machine.

HEADQUARTERS 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION,
Office of the Division Commander,
APO 469, 01 April 1944

“It is my desire to commend you for outstanding performance of duty as a member of the Division Board Umpiring Parachute Rifle Battalion Proficiency Tests, during the month of March 1944.

In performing your umpire’s arduous duties well and in an outstanding manner, you have rendered a lasting service to battalions umpired and to this Division. This fine performance of duty will help materially in preparing these units for their next participation in combat.”

Signed
M.B. RIDGWAY
Major General, U.S. Army
Commanding
THE INVASION OF HOLLAND

The Return From Normandy

After Normandy, one of our officers told me he had made the invasion as a 21 year old, 2nd lieutenant platoon leader in a rifle company of 145 men. When it was over he returned 10 years older, a Captain with 18 men in the same company.

After 38 days in Normandy, we debarked at Southampton, England, taking the train back to Quorn. The next night those on pass headed to town where they played darts, talked and had drinks “on the pub.” With pay in their pockets and a seven-day leave, everyone took off in all directions. Dean Garber and I took the train to London while Bob Dwyer (demolition platoon leader) headed for Scotland.

Arriving at the train station in London, we heard a tremendous explosion some distance away, our first introduction to the German V-2 rocket. Very powerful, with no incoming sound, it caused jangled nerves, disruption, damage and casualties. Looking at each other asking, “Should we go back to Quorn?” we decided to stay and get on with life while we could! If we were going to die, at least it could be in the comfort of showers, good food, drink and clean white sheets.

Later during the Holland campaign, the V-2 was visible in the far distance with its white plume signature, headed straight up, then a curving arc across the horizon, on its way to England. Next were the slower, low-flying buzz bombs — noisy, sounding more like an old-fashioned washing machine. When the engine cut out there was momentary silence, and then with a nose dive it hit the ground followed by an explosion. Both the V-2 and the buzz bomb were directed at London with no specific target.
While in London, the radio and newspapers announced the death of the German General Von Rundstedt and its probable impact on the course of the war.

Blackouts were strictly enforced with streetlights turned off and windows blacked out. Only the slits of lights from jeeps and other vehicles were visible. If someone happened to light a cigarette or show a light, there were shouts, “Douse it.”

Returning to Quorn, replacements had already arrived and were being assigned to the various companies. With losses of 50 per cent from Normandy, there were many new faces. Then there was the sad news, learning of those who didn’t make it.

**Operation Market Garden**

From July 8th to September 15th, 18 different missions to Holland were scrubbed with word that General Patton had overrun most of them. On September 8, we moved to the airfield, ready to go for another mission and again the drop was cancelled and back we went to Quorn. This ended when we were briefed on operation “Market Garden,” with Market the name for the airborne phase and Garden for the ground forces.

Shortly before Market Garden, I was told to report to the company commander. There, introduced to a lieutenant, I was told that he would be interrogating German prisoners of war and would make the combat jump with us. “Fielder, find a parked C-47 and show him how to jump. You’re going to be the jump master.” I asked Lt Magdits if he ever had parachuted before. After a negative nod, off we went to find an aircraft.

I explained the sequence of commands, the proper exit and his number in the stick, then made sure he would be seated across from me so that I could watch him if he needed help. He absorbed the instructions with little emotion, nodding his head now and then that he understood.
I learned that Magdits, born and brought up on the German side of the Holland border was familiar with our drop zone area. Without much conversation he wanted to get on with it. I respected him for his guts; as it would be his first parachute jump as well as one made in combat.

Shortly after 10 a.m. on Sunday, September 17, 1944, from airfields all over southern England, the greatest armada of troop-carrying aircraft ever assembled for a single operation took to the air.

The sound of so many aircraft in the vast armada overhead, forming up for the flight to Holland, could be heard for miles. The number of aircraft presented quite a sight to the people gathered in the streets of the villages and cities below. It was reported that it took an hour and a half for the armada to pass a given point.

Escorted over Europe by P-38s and P-51s, above and below us, one would occasionally peel off for suppressive fire against the German anti-aircraft crews.
Although Magdits became violently sick during the flight with the aircraft bouncing around, he did just fine, gritting his teeth. I felt sorry for him but there wasn’t much that could be done.

As we approached the DZ with the 20-minute red light on, I had the stick stand up and hook up. Looking out the door, black puffs of flack appeared with a few tracers arcing up from the anti-aircraft fire. We were lucky with only a few rounds hitting the fuselage. Other troop carriers didn’t fare as well after the drop as black clouds could be seen where aircraft went down from German anti-aircraft fire.

Drifting down, I saw two surprised German soldiers hurriedly bicycling in the opposite direction. The locals’ upturned faces disappeared in their homes. After landing on the drop zone, I was astonished to see one of our fighter pilots emerging from the underbrush looking somewhat bedraggled, his elegant pinks and greens muddied from several days of hiding. Waving a 45 Colt, he eagerly greeted us like a long lost buddy.

Magdits and I had landed close together, so I accompanied him to the nearest house where he obtained information from the residents, learning there were no German units of any strength in the area.

After the war I tried to contact Magdits, but his letter was returned, the forwarding address unknown.

On the narrow corridor that would carry the armored drive, there were five major bridges to take. They had to be seized intact by the airborne assault. It was the fifth, the crucial bridge over the Lower Rhine at a place called Arnhem, sixty-four miles behind the German lines, that worried Lieutenant General Frederick Browning, Deputy Commander, First Allied Airborne Army. Pointing to the Arnhem Bridge on the map he asked, “How long will it take the armor to reach us?” Field Marshal Montgomery replied
briskly, “Two days.” Still looking at the map, Browning said, “We can hold it for four.” Then he added, “But Sir, I think we might be going a bridge too far.”

The combined Allied drop, that included 7250 parachutists from the 82nd, was the most successful single combat drop in the European Theater of Operations. For the first time in an American operation, parachuting artillery of a dozen 75mm pack howitzers with artillerymen landed exactly as planned. A dramatic comparison could be made between a truly successful drop and the bitter defeat that followed.

All in all there were 1550 troop carrier aircraft, including nearly 500 that were towing gliders. With seven parachute regiments, the number of aircraft, gliders and cargo parachutes, all in the air at the same time, provided such a stunning view that photographers were unable to capture the scope and the depth of such an operation.

Source: 4 and partial text

After assembling on the DZ, our regimental headquarters company moved into an abandoned bunker. In one room I saw a German newspaper, beside a cup of coffee, lying on a table with pages opened to a map of Holland. In the closet a German uniform neatly hung up. The occupant had departed in a hurry.
We followed closely the progress of British tanks as they slowly made their way up the corridor toward Nijmegen. One day, hearing the sound of tanks, some one shouted, “It’s Shermans.” Everyone thought they heard “Germans,” grabbed their rifles, and then learned that the British Cold Stream Guard had arrived in Sherman tanks.

Later the company moved to the town of Groesbeek, adjacent to the flatlands and dikes along the Waal River. We were impressed with the cleanliness of the streets, sidewalks, homes and overall appearance of the countryside in direct contrast to other countries. Shelling soon changed this.

As our stay wore on, the shelling became more frequent. We dug deep foxholes and slept with a blanket that provided some degree of warmth. I was awakened one night with a rat starting to nibble on my chin.

The communication officer for the regiment, a captain, refused to sleep in a foxhole, preferring instead the comfort of a bed that he found in the house. I think he did come out once or twice, diving into a foxhole when the shelling became intense and close.

For three days, Gavin had been trying to seize the Nijmegen Bridge. He devised a bold plan; a river crossing and at the same time a frontal attack on the southern end of Nijmegen that in turn would ensure the capture of the bridge at both ends.

On 20 September the 504th carried out a heroic crossing of the Waal River. With artillery support the first wave of the 504th assaulted in twenty-six assault boats, under intense fire, taking 200 casualties in the process. On D+4 the 504th finally secured their hold on the bridge.

British General Browning agreed with Gavin’s assessment. ‘I have never seen a more gallant action.”’
About 1100 pm one night, I received a hurry-up call to report to the regimental S-3 (operations). I was told a German recon patrol had stumbled over several trip flares at one of our outposts, setting them off. I went out to the company outpost, reinstalled the trip flares and so reported this to the S-3. The amusing part of this was that I had completely forgotten about it until Allan Langdon, author of Ready, sent me three pages from the regimental S-3 journal that recounted the incident. I don’t remember installing those flares, although it was simple enough. Probably I leaned on one of my friends in the demolition platoon for advice.

After the seizure of the Nijmegen Bridge, the regimental command post was moved across the Waal River to a location between the Nijmegen railroad bridge and the Nijmegen Bridge. There for the first time a German jet fighter, a recon aircraft, made a brief appearance as it followed the river, low, then came up and over the two bridges. It was so fast that the anti-aircraft fire responded long after it had disappeared. We were impressed.
German frogmen managed to swim up the river one night, planting demolitions that successfully dropped a span of the railroad. When the demolitions exploded, the strength of the impact so rocked me that the building seemed to turn on its side, then on the other.

Our troops stood and silently watched the return of survivors of the decimated 1st British Airborne as they walked or rode across the Nijmegen Bridge. Years later after the war, I expressed appreciation personally to several surviving members of the British Airborne Division for their incredible courage at Arnhem.

Under British General Dempsey, the 82nd engaged in seemingly endless indecisive patrol action. Cold hard rain lashed the area as men were wasted in futile ground fighting.

The initial success was short-lived because of the defeat of the British units at Arnhem. The gateway to Germany would not open in September 1944, and the 82nd was ordered back to France.

The mistakes of Montgomery, the weather, the radio communication breakdown together with the unexpected presence of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps in Arnhem, all contributed to a disastrous defeat.

Cornelius Ryan said it eloquently in his book, A Bridge Too Far:

“The stand of the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem remains one of the greatest feats of arms in World War II military history. But it was also a major defeat — Britain’s second Dunkirk. Thus, as bureaucracies often tend to hide their failures, documentation in both American and British archives is all too frequently scanty and hard to come by. To unscramble some of the riddles and to present what I believe is the first complete version of the airborne-ground-attack invasion from the
standpoint of all participants ... has taken me the best part of seven years.

“Of all the major plans and campaigns following Normandy, none was more significant than Operation Market Garden; the tragic story was virtually unknown in the United States (1974). The successful role of the 82nd and the 101st Airborne in the battle — in particular, the crossing of the Waal River by Gavin’s troops — rarely merits more than a paragraph or two in British accounts.”

**A Note On Casualties**

Allied forces suffered more casualties in Market Garden than in the mammoth invasion of Normandy. Most historians agree that in the twenty-four hour period of D-day, June 6, 1944, total Allied losses reached an estimated 10,000 – 12,000. In the nine days of Market-Garden combined losses — airborne and ground forces — in killed, wounded and missing amounted to more than 17,000.

British casualties were the highest: 13,226. General Urquhart’s division was almost completely destroyed.

American losses, including glider pilots and the IX Troop Carrier Command, are put at 3,974. The 82nd Airborne Division lost 1,432; the 101st, 2,118 and air losses were 424.

German losses came to 3,300. Ryan, after interviewing German commanders estimated that Army Group B lost another 7,500-10,000 men.

While there are no known figures for Dutch civilian casualties, they are estimated at 10,000, as a result of the forcible evacuation of the Arnhem sector together with the deprivation and starvation in the terrible winter that followed the attack.

After the war, learning of the terrible conditions in Holland, I sent care packages of food and clothing to the fine Dutch family who had befriended us in Grosebeek.
Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands wrote to Cornelius Ryan, “My country can never again afford the luxury of another Montgomery success.”

Sources: Partial text from 1, 2, 4
BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Ten Days Before Christmas

Individuals have told much about the Battle of the Bulge during December 1944 through February of 1945. Troopers in the 505th remember the battles fought during that winter in the Ardennes as intensely cold, often freezing temperatures and in ankle and waist deep snow along with cases of frostbite.

The 505th along with the division had returned to its base in France after the campaign in Holland. Placed in army reserve, it began receiving replacements and was given a chance to rest. The regiment, housed at Camp Suippes, France in a collection of bleak looking barracks that had been built during World War I, believed that it was merely a temporary stopping place before the regiment was shipped back to England. But this was not to be.

Instead, it would be here that they would be based, with passes given to Paris, Brussels, and the French Riviera for a few days. The nearby city of Rheims had its beautiful cathedral but after seeing the cathedral once, the city offered more interesting diversions that were hard to resist, especially after the hard fighting in Holland.

Personnel from support units stationed in Rheims were resentful that cocky paratroopers were invading their home territory. All this proved to be a flash point between the rear echelon personnel and the paratroopers that caused fighting and bruised limbs. The regimental commander, Lt. Col. Ekman, put the city off limits for a couple of days, threatening to make it permanent if the troopers couldn’t calm down and quit fighting. A threatened cutoff of liberal passes along with reduced training and intramural sports had the desired effect.
Initially the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions including the 505th were committed as part of the Army reserve to stem the German breakthrough. As is well known, Hitler had launched a bold counterstroke through the Belgium Ardennes forest in an attempt to recapture the port of Antwerp as well as trapping a British Army group and parts of the U.S. Army ground forces.

Even though launched as a complete surprise with initial success, Hitler’s gamble failed and his armies were defeated. The courageous stand of many individuals and units from squad to division eventually made the difference.

Initially orders were for both airborne divisions to go to Bastogne, Belgium but that changed. General Gavin (temporarily commanding XVIII Airborne Corps) designated that since the 82nd was already on the road and ahead of the 101st, it was ordered to continue on with the 101st stop-
ping at Bastogne By the morning of December 20th the 82nd had established a defensive line with three battalions abreast withstanding an assault by the Germans.

**How It Began**

The Germans had struck at dawn on December 16 along a sixty-mile front. It was a bitterly cold, foggy, overcast day, ideal for the Germans who had hoped for such weather to neutralize Allied air. First came a massive artillery barrage, then swarms of infantry, then tanks. The Americans ran out of their warm huts and cellars and sandbagged trenches and stared in stunned disbelief as screeching artillery and chattering small-arms fire kicked up the snow around them.

Some green American troops, meeting panzers for the first time, fled in fear. On the whole, however, considering the massive weight of the attack, the Americans fought valiantly and resourcefully. Many units were isolated and surrounded with communications with higher headquarters cut off. But the tough veterans were not completely intimidated. Whole units of infantry and artillery and bands of engineers pulled back to better defensive positions and to crossroads and bridges, where they quickly set up strong enclaves of resistance.

The two German special outfits that were to assist Sapp Dietrich’s Sixth Panzer Army were the parachute battalion and Skorzeny’s saboteurs (impersonating Allied personnel) but they contributed little in the initial assault. By D-day, only four hundred of the twelve hundred German paratroopers had assembled, and the operation had to be postponed. Skorzeny’s brigade, caught up in a massive traffic jam could not break out for the planned dash behind enemy lines to sow confusion and seize a Meuse River bridge (and possibly assassinate Allied generals). However, the Allies obtained a copy of Skorzeny’s operational order from a captured German. The order probably caused greater panic than Skorzeny himself could have
achieved. Word of the order led to extraordinary confusion and distrust in the Allied camp and to stringent security measures.

Then, ready or not, the German parachute battalion was ordered to jump near Monschau on the night of December 16. All twelve hundred paratroopers had arrived at Paderborn; the Luftwaffe had found 112 Junkers transports to lift them. When Von der Heydte talked to the pilots, he was appalled, only one had ever dropped paratroopers. Nonetheless, by midnight the formation was airborne, flying very low, following a path of sky-beamed search lights toward the front. Near the Monschau drop zone, Von der Heydte (who had recently broken his arm) jumped first and was knocked unconscious in the landing.

Eventually Von der Heydte assembled about three hundred of his paratroopers, but they never could get organized for an attack, and ultimately Von der Heydte surrendered in despair. His other nine hundred paratroopers, widely scattered behind Allied lines, caused further disquiet and more stringent security measures, but did no real damage.

**Differing Views and Allied Command Infighting**

Of all the early Allied reactions, two very different views about how to cope with the situation arose. Montgomery, who had never had much confidence in Eisenhower, Bradley or Hodges, believed that the threat was of utmost gravity and would grow even more dire as the Germans committed reserves to widen the gap. He had no faith in the ability of the Americans to deal with it and felt he should be placed in full command of the Allied front. His tactical plan was to “roll with the punch,” hoping to stop Germans at the Meuse while holding the northern and southern shoulders. He would then “tidy up the battlefield” and at some distant, indefinite date lead a “spoiling attack,” the single counterattack into Germany from the north. Eisenhower, Bradley, Hodges and Patton believed
that the German offensive was rash, ill advised, and bound to fail and that it had presented the Allies with a golden opportunity to destroy the principal German forces on the western front. Their tactical plan was to simultaneously contain the forward thrust and powerfully attack the “bulge” on its flanks at the earliest possible moment. These differing views would lead to the most tempestuous infighting the Allied generals had yet engaged in, a dispute that would very nearly wreck the Allied high command. Eisenhower’s decision to release the 82nd and 101st divisions to Bradley did not at first include Ridgway and the XVIII Airborne Corps. In any case, at the specific request of Courtney Hodges, the plan was soon abandoned and Ridgway and the XVIII Corps were ordered to lead the airborne divisions into battle. Thus Ridgway would make his combat debut as corps commander on the ground, not in the air.

Text of Breakthrough and Differing Views from Source 1

**Double Withdrawal**

On December 24, we received the controversial order from General Montgomery to withdraw to another defensive line. At the time many of us didn’t react to it other than that it was another order that we would follow for the thousandth time. Others, such as those in I Company, who had fought hard battles and suffered casualties to gain the same ground that they had to give up, were quite vociferous about the order. For one thing the regiment had established a strong defensive line along the Salm River. Most everyone agreed that it was a perfect barrier against tanks and one of the better defensive positions that the regiment had occupied. However the order held and with the last bridges blown, the regiment began its withdrawal on a cold, clear Christmas Eve.

Then a “double withdrawal” began with elements of the German infantry and regimental paratroopers withdrawing through each other’s lines at the same time. General
Gavin ordered that the withdrawal be made without fighting; this was done successfully except I Company found it necessary at one point to engage the Germans.

One group of about 50 Germans, hit by I Company and split off from their main group, turned back in the direction of the regimental command post. Cast in the role of "Horatio at the Bridge", a handful of regimental communications men and I were all that stood between the enemy and the command post. We deployed and "prepared to fight to the finish," but fortunately (or unfortunately) the Etrurians turned aside before they had a chance for everlasting glory." This is how my friend Allen Langdon described the incident his book Ready.

Thrust into the role of a rifleman, I remember the incident distinctly. The only men available at the time were the first sergeant and a handful of communication men. Late at night told to move out, search for and block any Germans, I started the patrol down the road when General Gavin drove past. He stopped and asked what we were doing. Satisfied with the answer he drove on. I selected a position on higher ground further down the road telling the first sergeant to move into a covering position some 50 to 70 yards away. We waited and waited in the snow as the night wore on. Then I saw a file of men on either side of the road coming towards our positions and with some relief realized they were friendly. A tall figure came up, peering into my face in the darkness. It was the battalion commander, who had been my company commander in regimental headquarters company. He said, "Fielder, what in the hell are you doing here?".

Not long after daylight our regiment was still in position with little enemy contact. Christmas Day had dawned cold and bleak; there was no hot food as the supply section was on the move and also no mail or Christmas observances since there were no chaplains. The day turned out tragically for D Company as P47's bombed what they thought
were the German lines. Two 500 pounders were dropped on the company’s positions, killing five troopers and injuring four others seriously.

On January 1-2 the 505th pulled back in preparation for the U.S. Army offensive the next day. The ultimate goal was the Salm River from which the 505th had withdrawn on December 24. The attack jumped off and by the time the day was finished so was I Company. Every officer was either dead or wounded and two thirds of the men were casualties. To make matters worse, the temperature started dropping and snow began to fall.

Then an unusual problem developed — the availability of water. Due to the freezing weather, water in the canteens froze solid. It took an incredible amount of time to heat snow long enough to obtain even a small amount of water. Roads in two battalion areas were virtually non-existent. Transportation was needed instead to evacuate the wounded and get water up to the units, so overcoats, packs and sleeping bags could not be distributed. Fortunately there was little or no artillery incoming, so most of the men could pace back and forth or jog in place to keep from freezing.

The plight of the men was bad enough, but it proved tragic to many of the wounded. Despite the incredible efforts of the medics the more seriously injured died of exposure. I was lucky, regimental headquarters company had found a billet in a small farmhouse so at least we were able to keep from freezing.

The regiments in the 82nd finally managed to reach their objectives. However other units had found it so difficult going through the snow that their objectives had not been reached. The non-airborne units having more equipment found the going extremely difficult. Accordingly, the 82nd was ordered to hold up but to continue pressure on the Germans to prevent them from digging in.
The good news for the day was that the engineers had finally bulldozed a makeshift road through the woods. So overcoats, packs, sleeping bags were brought up. This meant that an individual could get in the sleeping bag with everything he wore, including overcoats and shoes and get some sleep before the cold drove him out.

Continuing the attack, the regiment finally reached the Salm River but not before F Company lost its last officer. Sergeant Don McKeage took over the company until a replacement arrived. Then everyone was stunned to learn that Col. Vandervoort, the popular and respected 2nd Battalion commander, was wounded losing the sight in one eye, thereby ending a brilliant military career.

About half the regiment were casualties; half enemy inflicted while the other half were due to non-combat losses. The bitter cold and exposure caused old wounds to flare up and strangely enough the extreme cold triggered relapses of malaria contracted in the Mediterranean. With such losses the regiment was able to carry on only because individuals rose to fill the gaps. It was a case of privates leading squads and sergeants leading platoons.

There were several times while in a static position that the regiment wanting more intelligence directed an increase in reconnaissance patrols. So the word went out asking those officers in regimental headquarters company, who were relatively new, if they wanted to volunteer. While many volunteered, making the selection of individuals for patrols reminded me of a Bill Mauldin cartoon showing a grizzled sergeant selecting members for a patrol thinking, “Now who is it that owes me the ten dollars?”

On January 10-11, the 505th was relieved and we moved to Theux, Belgium for a well-earned rest where for the first time in its history, the regiment was billeted in civilian homes. The villagers and men in the regiment developed such strong relationships that when the regiment moved out, the townspeople presented a letter to the troopers
signed by the Mayor evidencing their high regard for them.

After the war, during a tour of Europe on the 50th anniversary of D-day, my wife and I, traveling with C Company, visited Theux. One of the troopers in the company asked if we would like to accompany him while he searched for his Belgian friend who had owned a small business in the village. We knocked on the door that the trooper remembered as the storekeeper’s home. His Belgian friend opened the door with a large grin welcoming us; nothing would do but drink to health and friendship. Later the village people held a dinner in C Company’s honor as well as for the other 505th veterans.

We moved out of Theux on January 26th and 27th in the middle of the night, our departure timed to take part in an attack that would carry the regiment to the Siegfried Line. The division jumped off the next day. The advance was unbelievably slow because of the weather, snow and road conditions. The 1st Battalion, which was last in line, had to wait two hours before jumping off.

Once through the Siegfried Line, we were relieved and pulled back with the 508th taking over. Because the regiment was at one-third strength everyone seemed to think we would return to the base camp in Suippes and Sissone, France. Instead we headed for the Hurtgen Forest area in what later would be called the “Rhineland “ campaign.

Used to seeing areas and towns laid to waste, nothing prepared us for the utter devastation we were to witness. Our line of march took us through an area where in the fall of 1944, a regiment of the 28th Infantry Division was annihilated in a small valley, caught in a vicious counterattack. The melting snows revealed the gruesome sight of dead American soldiers, tanks, tank destroyers, jeeps, trucks and equipment strewn about.
As we moved through Schmidt, the snow was beginning to melt leaving nothing but ankle-deep mud and a sea of desolation. Continuing to our final objective on the high ground overlooking the Rohr River, the regiment remained with little or no action taking place. The Germans had flooded the river by blowing the release valves, creating a barrier for both sides. On February 19th the regiment was relieved, moving back in 40 & 8s boxcars to Suippes where we marched, sadly depleted, through the gate from which we had left just over two months before.

CENTRAL EUROPE
The End in Sight

With replacements starting to stream in and be absorbed by the different units, the regiment made its last wartime practice jump from the newly introduced twin-door Curtiss Commando aircraft. The troopers didn’t mind jumping both sides of the aircraft at the same time and were also pleased to try a new quick release harness that proved to be a decided improvement over the old T-5 harnesses.

On April 2 the regiment received a new mission that included preventing any Germans from crossing the river in an attempt to break out. Higher headquarters had developed an insatiable desire for more intelligence, so as a result aggressive patrolling started with the stipulation the each battalion would send a patrol across the river each night using kayaks until assault boats became available. Some of the kayaks overturned and as a result, a major and captain were drowned. The opposite bank was heavily mined and booby-trapped, resulting in killed and missing troopers — probably from drowning.

In order to speed Montgomery up and keep the Russians from occupying Denmark, Eisenhower temporarily shifted the XVIII Airborne Corps with the 82nd, the 8th Infantry Division, the 7th Armored Division and the British 6th Airborne over to Montgomery. Orders were issued to force
a crossing of the Elbe in the vicinity of Blekede, Germany
some 35 miles southeast of Hamburg.

Accordingly the regiment moved by 40 & 8s arriving
in Blekede on April 29 and was told about the mission
to cross the Elbe. Allen Langdon wrote in *Ready*, “Of all
the operations undertaken by the 505th in World War II,
probably no operation was ‘sweat out’ by the ‘old men’
more than this one. With the combination of war’s end
just a few days away, four combat jumps and two years of
combat, the thought of being killed or drowned at the 11th
hour was just a little too bitter to contemplate.”

The time of the crossing was set for 0100 hours on April
30. Units arriving at the river site early were appalled to
see flimsy little assault boats for crossing the 400-yard
wide river. As *Ready* records, ”Probably no operation in
the history of the 505th was so screwed up from the very
beginning, nor had a happier ending.” Meeting little oppo-
sition and the fact that it had started snowing partially
obscuring the crossing as well as deadening the noise, the
bridge head three miles deep had been accomplished.

The units moved so fast that they stayed ahead of the
German artillery except regimental headquarters company
in Bleckede that was shelled heavily. The demolition pla-
toon leader and I were compelled to move underground.
Even then, the heavy and constant artillery shelling of the
town and the building that we occupied made us jumpy.

Shortly after crossing the Elbe, I was in a jeep driving
along the road when suddenly a 20mm opened up on a
small hill on our left flank spraying the countryside and
our jeep. We skidded to a stop, jumping into a nearby
ditch. I landed squarely on top of a dead civilian; his eyes
wide open staring at me. I managed to crawl along the
ditch waiting for the firing to stop. Later sitting in the jeep
I looked down to see my hands shaking badly. Maybe it
was thinking how to stay alive with the war about to end
together with the memory of a dead civilian staring at me when I landed on top of him.

With the formal declaration of war’s end on May 8th, 1945, the regiment became buried in surrendering Germans.

In the ensuing weeks the Army announced its point system with those in the regiment with 85 points, including myself, returning to the US and the others going on to Berlin with the 82nd.

So it was home at last!
Matthew B. Ridgway, General, U.S. Army Retired, wrote, “The accomplishments and bravery of one infantry regiment, the 505th, are too great to be lost to posterity. It is imperative that this historical saga be written.” Allan Langdon set about doing so. After months of research and intensive labor, he published a definitive work about the history of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

In the 90s, I was asked to write about the veterans of the 505th in a monthly column for a national airborne newspaper. I willingly accepted, as I had served with the 505th during all of its campaigns and combat jumps, forging bonds with many of the men in the regiment. The chronicles, more than anything else, offer a glimpse into the trauma of daily life in combat and reflect a pride of service.

Certain amounts of repetition of places and events have been retained in the chronicles for continuity of the story.

After moving to La Jolla, a friend rekindled my interest by urging me to preserve these accounts and add them to my book.

THOUGHTS ABOUT IRAQ

While putting this book together, writing about the fine soldiers and officers in our regiment and their service in World War II, I thought about the stark and deadly difference now facing the soldiers and officers in our war in Iraq.

In World War II we recognized the gray uniforms of the German army as the enemy. We were never placed in a no-win situation where there were no victories. When we battled with the Germans there were victories, some blunders and defeats, but we didn’t have to worry about a smiling lady who approached us and then blew herself
up. We didn’t face half or more of a country whose people hated us and wanted us to leave. A writer expressed it as “a tsunami of hatred.”

During World War II, when we first occupied Naples, Italy, a battalion from the 505th patrolled the city. Then our engineers from the 505th helped to restore city utilities while Military Police and military government personnel from the 82nd were designated to restore law and order.

We didn’t have a civil war with insurgents killing their own people for some religious fanaticism. We are paying a price for our war in Iraq and don’t know when and if we will have a victory there.

We had a great victory in Europe and paid a price for it, but we were united, as we never have been before or since.
CHRONICLE ONE

In the never-ending effort to gather and analyze intelligence, patrols of varying strength and normally composed of volunteers are sent into enemy territory to obtain prisoners and identify enemy units. These operations are exceedingly difficult and dangerous, especially in semi-static situations such as that which existed in Holland during the winter of 1944.

Both sides were dug in and the Germans were not given to surrender easily with their homeland facing imminent invasion by the Allied forces. The success of a patrol was measured by the prisoners taken and the value of the information gathered. Despite individual acts of bravery, casualties and those killed in action, some patrols came away empty-handed.

This then is a story of such an action about an ill-fated patrol run three times in succession in Holland during November 1944. It came to light at the time I was writing a column in a national airborne newspaper about the men in 505th Parachute Regiment during World War II. Bob Gillette, a former member of the Regimental S2 intelligence section, handed me a copy of a letter from Don Adrianson, also in the intelligence section, written to him April 26, 1945 while Adrianson was recuperating from wounds in a hospital in England.

I told my son about the patrol action, showing him the columns I had written in the airborne newspaper. After extensive research, John came to know the background of the members of the patrol, even their mannerisms, behavior and idiosyncrasies to include one of the patrol members singing obscene ditties. His story captures their actions along with their personalities.

The account of the patrol action by John was clarified by the patrol leader Russ O’Neal and from an account by Rollo Morris, a member of the last patrol.
Thru The Wire
By John Fielder

He idly thumbed thru the usual stack of dull business mail. Fourth from bottom, as he reached for his car keys, one envelope had a letter with a U.S. War Department address. That letter, an official request to solve a mystery set deep in the heart of the last place on earth he wanted to go, contained three names in the second paragraph.

Pvt Sergé L. Capderoque... 82nd Airborne
Pvt. Donald L. Adrianson... 82nd Airborne
Pvt. Stephen C. Mason ... 82nd Airborne

Three names. Three Silver Stars. Three Purple Hearts.

World War II had been a long time ago, but if ever the twentieth century screamed for one of those GI Willie and Joe cartoons, Russ O’Neal could hear it now. Willie and Joe, dead and too dumb to know it, their exhausted expressions still mouthing words.

“...I dunno, Willie, you think they’d wait this long to track down a bunch of officers...?”

Russ O’Neal, brown loafers, beige chinos and a blue, button-downed collar Oxford shirt, involuntarily lowered the letter, raised it again, but couldn’t continue. He shot his watch another glance, like the sweep hand of his twenty-five dollar watch just measured a wide span of years.

Unshaven faces of the paratroopers reappeared, the peculiar smell of dead bodies along the dikes and thin canals that cut the green pastures, the line of broken trees, the smashed farmhouses, the flatlands east of Nijmegen where the German border ran unevenly, like milk spilled from a glass across a tabletop.

He suddenly felt hollowed out, that letter in his hand, those three names, a date, November 3, 1944.
Consider that during the war, soldiers were lost at 1150 per hour every day, or 19 per minute, this figures out to be one death every second in seven days of war prior to Friday, November 3, 1944, during a time when no major battles were fought. Fourteen thousand and forty-seven soldiers still managed to find their lives totally extinguished, a piece of their flesh radically altered in combat, or maybe just their entire whereabouts unknown altogether. The math broke down with a nasty daily average of two thousand and six smashed soldiers, Sunday through Saturday. A new dog face every forty-three seconds.

O’Neal’s “Enlisted Record and Report of Separation –27 A 30-HRR/22” of August 1945, describes him as single, twenty- four years old, blue eyes, black hair, six feet tall, 175 pounds. A photograph taken long after the war shows his eyes reflecting a sort of distant, humorous gaze. Beyond that he was known to be able to tell a story. Cornelius Ryan included one in his book A Bridge Too Far. Other less acclaimed books contained his stories, too. But besides an obscure article in the Army Times, O’Neal kept the events of November 3, 1944 within the circle of other airborne veterans.

His regiment, the 505th of the 82nd Airborne had begun their journey on a killing trail that wound through six countries and two and a half years with a jump in the middle of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division in the olive groves of Sicily. After that they lost lives humping hundreds of miles of dusty Italian hills and many more in the D-day drop of the Normandy invasion before the bloody advance thru France.

Now, six weeks after the intense combat surrounding the invasion of Holland had fallen off the front pages of American newspapers, word out of the Allied Supreme Command was war could end by Christmas. But the day-to-day living, breathing world of GI nightmares remained composed around a complex set of horrific images trans-
lated into “Please Lord, whatever you want, just don’t let stupidity kill me.”

The 82nd Airborne unexpectedly found itself entrenched in a static defensive line set almost exactly on the Dutch border with Germany, where the four hundred yard-wide Waal River looped eastward, coursing between the banks of the old levees that protected the Dutch lowlands. From his company position along a low, nameless ridge running southeast, O’Neal watched small brief, deadly encounters continually unfold in the desolate, pockmarked Dutch flatlands. Two armies going nowhere in this sector of war, the neighborhood analyzed down to the last shattered birch stump, the war reduced to rumbles of a handful of men supported by mortar fire, close in, violent.

As the chain of command became anxious for more intelligence, the rules of the game changed. During the final gloomy, wet days of October, orders passed down from General James Gavin, commanding general of the 82nd Airborne, to capture German prisoners for interrogation. Sgt O’Neal was told he would lead a patrol designed to do just that.

Although their actual military value was suspect, the at- that-time divisional G-2 intelligence section head for the 82nd Airborne, Brig. General (ret.) Walter Winton (then Lt.Col), recently rationalized it this way: “...there was pressure at all levels to obtain intelligence.” But the grunt labor employed to accomplish the task saw it otherwise. Former Staff Sergeant Bob Gillette, of the 505th regimental intelligence section, cut to the heart of the matter: “It was a hangover from World War I or earlier, and most were less than successful.” Pfc Rollo Morris, also in the intelligence section, who helped direct supporting mortar fire for O’Neal’s patrol from a vantage point in a house adjacent to the ridge, and was later badly wounded from a trip mine in a night patrol action intended to retrieve any of O’Neal’s group still alive, recently wrote “(Those) patrols were
absolutely uncalled for. We never, ever needed prisoners and they never could tell you anything.”

O’Neal found the three volunteers he’d been assigned sitting on their helmets outside the regimental CP (command post) smoking British cigarettes, eating out of tins of British Bully beef. Three men in baggy fatigue pants, muddy jump boots, field jackets, with Thompson submachine guns, heads tilted. Tough eyes, each face the perfection of a war face, gaunt lean men. No set of eyes focused in the same direction, each expression filled by a reservoir of their own vision of violence and darkness and irony. They were young but youth had long since left them.

The blond-headed, slender-faced twenty-two year old was Private Donald Adrianson who O’Neal had seen before at regimental headquarters back in Britain, working on sand table models of German positions for the invasion. He remembered Adrianson from pubs around Quorn, England where he played a wicked piano. He reminded O’Neal of one of those handsome sociable University of Georgia fraternity boys. Adrianson, who had been a student at Georgetown University, greeted O’Neal in French, then German. O’Neal asked what he said. “Throw down your weapon and surrender, Superman,” Adrianson told him.

The dark-faced kid from Jersey City, New Jersey next to Adrianson was twenty-one year old Private Stephen Mason. He tossed his cigarette and scratched his cheek with his thumbnail, muttering something. O’Neal had already heard of Mason’s edgy reputation. With a group of paratroopers in the cold dawn of the first hours of the first night of the Normandy invasion, Mason had stood
beside a burning German command car, mangled along a hedgerow, eight dead Germans, with a single officer left alive. The story ran that Mason gave him a cigarette, made a pillow from a coat and let him take his canteen. And then, when the others heard “Danke, danke, and saw tears in the German officer’s eyes while the artillery pounded the invasion beach head and everyone marveled at the sparkling horizon fires, was it also true Mason blew the man’s head off?

The third man, twenty-one-year-old Frenchy Capderoque slapped the back of Mason’s helmet and grinned. “Relax. Steve,” he said. “Here’s your chance to bring one of those Germans back alive for a change.” Capdroque had a quick laugh, quicker eyes; he stood tall and lean, like a recruiting poster paratrooper, and, under the influence of a swinging Glenn Miller riff, he could jitterbug the shoes off anyone.

O’Neal led them out at midnight under a wartime blue floodlight of a full moon. They carried Thompson submachine guns, .45’s as side arms, gammon grenades and wire cutters and a radio O’Neal shouldered. At the base of the dike that intersected the German line, they listened for sounds beyond the usual chatter of gunfire that carried on a cold wind through the ash and the birch trees, then they moved up along the dike itself. Halfway there, O’Neal found the first trip wire, then another trip wire, then another. He had two alternatives, taking the open ground in front of the German positions under a moonlight equivalent to dull streetlights, or going back up the ridge. No one complained about the uphill walk heading back.

The following day he was told to take his patrol out again at midnight. The plan was simple: gain surprise by crossing the open ground. Adrianson, Mason and Capderoque again removed anything they wore that made a sound. Again there was moonlight. Advancing across the open ground felt like wearing a fluorescent bull’s eye. German small arms fire quickly opened up on them.
O"Neal pulled the patrol back again.

The next morning O’Neal saw Capderooque gesturing come on, as O’Neal rolled over with the nudge of Capderooque’s boot to his leg. An officer in an earthen dug-out, hunched over a map covered with plastic and marked with red and black grease pencil, asked O’Neal to take his patrol out again, this time during daylight.

Again the plan was raw simplicity. The distance across the flats to the dike where the German line began measured only a few hundred yards. Mortar fire would drop in smoke to cover the patrol’s dash across. They would snatch a prisoner and hustle back. Enroute, O’Neal and Mason would cover the flanks with Adrianson and Capderooque in the middle, Adrianson telling the bastards to surrender, Capderooque besides him as close-in muscle.

Someone whistled under his breath. O’Neal asked what time.

The officer told him whenever he was ready.

There is no record of who said what then. Perhaps Mason recited his usual obscene ditty everyone was sick of hearing, his eye shadowed under his tilted-down helmet. Maybe Capderooque whistled Glenn Miller riffs. Adrianson could have put the finishing touches on a letter to his wife.

Whatever, O’Neal signaled the officer at the appointed time and the four of them moved out of the ridge to the moist earth of a road embankment through the morning mist that carried the fetid smell of the canals, walking ten yards apart, feeling mud stick to their boots, the tall grass bent under the weight of the dew, the sky gray with the Ruhr Valley fifty miles away, the outskirts of where the heartbeat of the German industrial might began. They waited a few minutes, then smoke rounds sailed over and started detonating. When the smoke screen thickened, O’Neal pointed at Mason, gave him a tough-fist gesture,
then did the same to Adrianson and Capderoque. They stood up and started to run, smoke shells still popping, wind in their ears, the sound of their labored breathing, approaching the smoke, one hundred yards, seventy-five, then fifty yards, forty yards, twenty yards, until through the smoke the dike appeared just ahead.

There was movement in the German trench line. O’Neal could have fired a head shot easy: a quick pause, aim, trigger slack, squeeze, done. Only he had to cover the distance first.

Two eyewitness accounts exist of what happened next.

First was O’Neal’s. He saw a soldier stand up in Capdroque’s path, like a gift. Adrianson screamed German commands, but the soldier fired. It went high. Capderoque spun him around with a burst from his Thompson. O’Neal lost sight of them as they jumped into the German position. He could hear Adrianson yelling back at him, “O’Neal! Cover fire!” A machine gun opened up farther up along the dike in Mason’s direction, maybe seventy-five yards away. Mason, incredibly, began to charge towards it, bobbing and weaving, ending up on the plane of the dike where O’Neal saw him get cut down. Adrianson tossed a grenade that exploded wide. A German grenade came back the other way. Schmieser slugs ripped the ground as O’Neal made a dash towards Adrianson and Capderoque that he had to quit short with a dive into a shallow trench. He ended up on his back, caught a weird glimpse of sunlight peeking through the gray sky. A fat bird flying up there spun end over end, heading in towards him. The bird was a German grenade.

The explosion lifted him out of the trench. He thought maybe he’d fallen on his trench knife, gotten stuck in his ribs. His radio crackled. He heard himself shouting desperate commands that turned inexplicably unintelligible. The sun was completely out now. There was a breeze, he could feel it against his cheek and the sky was heavy, little
darts moving in groups of three, sailing beyond him, down towards Adrianson and Capderoque, darts that got fatter and darker. The ground shook against his back and the sky was filled with disconnected snaps and curiously precise lines of red fire.

More than anything he had ever wanted, it was the small thing of hearing Adrianson’s, Mason’s or Capderoque’s voice. He listened very, very hard between explosions. Then he concentrated on not feeling himself bleed as he crawled back towards the protection of the ridge. He was immediately evacuated to a field hospital.

The second eyewitness was then Lt. Col. John Norton, a member of General Gavin’s staff and later a Lt. General, who saw Adrianson go down. In a letter he said he thought to himself, “What a goddam pity. After I got the precise data from the 505th CP (command post), I managed with my field glasses to get in on a very close position where I could see the action. The small patrol had some prep mortar fire with smoke as they jumped off and they scampered perhaps 100 yards and I recall they got to one foxhole containing a German soldier and while trying to haul him out ... they were hit hard by small arms fire. I definitely, in my glasses, saw Adrianson go down ... a very vivid and tragic picture.” He concluded that the covering fire, had it been more accurate, could have made the charge across the open ground, “a good effective risk.”

For the next six months, the 82nd Airborne went about the business of war with bitter stops in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge, crossing of the Rhine, and a score of smaller actions, until finally the occupation of Berlin itself. Meanwhile Russ O’Neal mended in field
hospitals in France and England. For all he knew, Frenchy and Mason and Adrianson were dead.

The story could have ended there but it didn’t.

Years later O’Neal had gotten the letter from the government asking if he could verify that Mason and Capderoque were missing in action. The letter didn’t mention Adrianson. By that time, O’Neal had been dummfounded to find out what had happened to him.

**Holland – July 1950**

The car radio carried an Armed Forces radio station with news about another war, this one set in Korea, as the wet asphalt on the narrow road heading east out of Nijmegen reflected the glare of the late morning sun. O’Neal squinted as he drove, his wife silent beside him. The fellow in the back seat with a crooked nose, black horn-rimmed glasses, and white hands neatly placed on his knees was from Graves Registration. O’Neal kept mispronouncing his name.

The Dutch landscape unfolded before him just as he had known it years before, more picturesque now, the dikes and the levees, the fields and the farmhouses.

White and red signs marked the Dutch/German border along a line almost exactly where Mason and Capderoque had gone down. A year after the war ended, the Germans returned to the Nijmegen lowlands they had flooded in retreat and the Dutch since had reclaimed, this time the Germans working in special details to sweep
the battlefield for unexploded ordinance, and remains of
dead soldiers. In the immediate area where Mason and
Capderoque had gone down seven unidentified groups
of bone fragments had been reported, but Army foren-
sics experts could distinguish no similarities between
those unidentified and Mason’s or Capderoque’s medical
records. In 1949, Army investigators again swept the area
and again nothing indicated the remains of Mason or
Capderoque.

Now, studying the dikes, O’Neal noticed traces of the
old German trench line. He took a bundle from the trunk
of the Peugeot, unwrapped two shovels and rolled up his
sleeves. The fellow from Graves Registration took off his
coat and hoisted a shovel of his own.

By noon they had found nothing. O’Neal stopped and
looked around at the dikes and the road behind him and
the ridgeline. Then he began again, like it was the most
vital, important work he would ever do. Finally he hit the
hard thing.

With his bare hands, he cleared the dirt from an
American helmet, its webbing rotted away. O’Neal read
aloud Adrianson’s name, his serial number. A few minutes
later, he hit something else, another helmet, a helmet that
belonged to Capderoque. It was like working a crossword
puzzle backwards from there. O’Neal’s wife, a registered
nurse, carefully laid the remains out on the army blanket,
turning and positioning the bones just so, naming the
bones. The Graves registration official took pictures. They
didn’t look at each other for a while.

Tiba, fibula, femur, pelvis, bits of cloth, web belt bits,
a corroded buckle, then lumbar vertebrae, thoracic verte-
brae, ribs, dog tags, a skull and a set of army wire cutters:
Frenchy Capderoque.

They searched next for Mason seventy-five yards away
where he had gone down on top of the dike charging the
machine gun. They excavated the remnants of nineteen foxholes and probed the ground with metal stakes. All they found was a set of Army cutters and a broken rifle stock.

The Graves Registration fellow took copious notes and later, far removed from the shock and the violence that had consumed them, two official reports from the 7887 Graves Registration Detachment were issued. One, under the heading of “Non-Recoverable Remains,” on form OQMG 1950 — “Memorialization of Non-Recoverable Remains of World War II.” Included was an analysis by an Army review board that concluded that the twenty-one years, three months and seventeen days of Private Stephen C. Mason’s life would officially end with the statement: “It is recommended that the remains, based upon the above information and research, be declared non-recoverable.”

So passed the dark-edged Stephen Mason.

So passed jitterbug aficionado Frenchy Capderoque, missing in action until Russ O’Neal returned to reclaim his bones and remove his name from the roles of those listed as missing in action.

As for Donald Adrianson, O’Neal had been thrilled to discover after the war that Adrianson wasn’t dead; no, the Germans had indeed shot him up, but they had captured him, hauled him off to POW captivity. Six months later, he returned stateside, a hero coming back to his wife and a new civilian life. O’Neal got in touch with him for a visit. But there wasn’t going to be any reunion. Adrianson was dead. He was riding in a pickup truck with two others when a piece of tile became dislodged from a passing truck, striking him in the forehead. Taken to the hospital, he died.

O’Neal survived until April 1997; a piece of his core grooved into a path that continually regressed into the dark events of November 3, 1944. A memory that, accord-
ing to a close friend, haunted him until he died by his own hand.

Like all soldiers, good or bad, their Army records were stored in a cavernous hall of Armed Forces files in St. Louis, delineating the brief histories of four airborne troopers locked into a luckless series of meaningless patrols that left them killed, wounded, missing in action or captured. An enormous combined sacrifice rendered into simple history and columns of dry numbers.

On July 17, 1963, eighty percent of those records, 16 to 18 million official military files spanning World War I through the Korean War were destroyed by fire. There are no duplicates. No microfilm. Whatever they represented of American history simply no longer exists.

**Holland, 1997**

In 1997, the Dutch arranged a reunion tour of the battlefield and drop zones for veterans of the 82nd Airborne. A polite, English-speaking guide followed a script in front of a gleaming bus. The veterans and their wives listened politely.

“You remember names such as Groesbeek, Beek, Grave, Nijmegen, Thor, Devil’s Hill. No doubt, when I mention names of places in the area, you will think about the bitter fighting. You will think about how you or your buddy were seriously wounded. You will think about your buddy who died of his sustained wounds or was killed in action. If you ask something, I would try to answer your question. We are on a tight schedule. Hope you have an enjoyable day.”

The countryside had changed, then, maybe it hadn’t, that all depended on your point of view. The green hills were spotted with the color of spring flowers and the sun glowed through the edges of a parade of clouds. But the contours of the dikes and the peculiar smell of the canal water were common only to the memory of terrible things; all in all, like one of those trick pictures where the profile
of the beautiful Victorian woman turns into a menacing hag.

A sports club, young men on bicycles, cycled along the highway past the gleaming bus. The young men laughed good-naturedly and waved at the veterans, sun reflecting off their handlebars. Their exertion seemed effortless as the young men faded away into the distance and then they were gone.

**John Fielder’s Afterthoughts**

“If I was a better writer I probably could have captured some of the parts about it that I can only feel and not express. But that’s part of the mystery, being able to nail down the corners, wondering if the heart of it has drifted away without being noticed.”

“The hook (main point of the account) ended up being different than I thought. I remember all of our conversations about what it should be. Ultimately, I realized that this story is part of a much bigger story, more than an adventure and more than just the wasted sacrifice of troopers and the redemption of their remains. For me, the hook is that Russ O’Neal’s story was repeated over and over thousands of times during the war. His tragedy probably had fifty thousand similar iterations among other groups. And I think that comprehension of the huge scale of all of those stories is fading away as the years pass by. The impact of death in that magnitude ultimately is probably beyond articulation. But in their hearts, I think just the survivors understand. The survivors know what it really meant. The rest of us have the personnel files and the stories in books. I aimed for the heart of that idea in this article.”

John Fielder served in the Marine Corps and is an Associate Member of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association.
More About The Holland Patrols

Excerpts from
Lieutenant General (ret) Jack Norton’s Comments

Dear “Comrade Bob”

“Your note to me and your exchange with Winton brought back many poignant memories!

“For whatever it’s worth, this is my recollection. In the later days of Market Garden perhaps late September or early October, there was lots of pressure to find out what the Wehrmacht units were doing — particularly on our eastern flank — the area to the southeast of the Nijmegen Bridge between the road and the (Rhine) Waal River. It was sort of a desolate river plain pock-marked by shell holes and various foxholes, trenches, etc.

“Somehow as G3, (operation section of the 82nd Airborne Division) I knew that my old regiment was mounting a patrol in “broad-ass” daylight and one of our most popular respected GI’s in the S2 section (Adrianson) had volunteered to go out to do his part — to perhaps satisfy his conscience about being a front-line combat soldier ...

“I definitely, in my glasses, saw Adrianson go down and get captured; he wanted to show his courage and now we have lost probably the best draftsman/artist in the 505!

“Frankly, I never knew about the three repetitions of patrols in that same area. Needless to say my recall may be faulty in many respects but being there in broad daylight close enough to see details on that battlefield, I’m certain I saw that young, blonde-headed Adrianson go down.
At least I’m glad to learn later that Adrianson survived and Russ O’Neal got back to our lines. Sorry I can’t offer more.”

“My very best to Betty and you. Leslie and I are carefully doing one day at a time.”

**Brigadier General (ret) Winton’s Opinion of the Risk**

I asked Brigadier General Walter Winton, who formerly headed up the 82nd Airborne Division’s G2 intelligence section during World War II for his opinion on running a patrol over the same route three times in succession. I mentioned that one of those in the regimental S2 intelligence section indicated that the patrols were uncalled for and that captured Germans from the outposts in question provided little or no information of value.

Dear Trooper Bob Fielder,

“While there was certainly pressure at all levels to get intelligence during our static days in Holland, it appears to me that it was extraordinarily hazardous to repeatedly risk the same patrol personnel over the same terrain. Once you give the enemy a pattern, he will wait for you. Our levels of command were sufficiently experienced by Holland so they should have been aware of this. It seems to me that responsibility lies at all levels, from Corps down. Cordially, Walter Winton.”

**Adrianson’s Letter To Gillette**

Here are excerpts from Don Adrianson’s letter to Bob Gillette that explains more fully what happened to Adrianson after he was wounded:
“... Assuming you’re still in the same spot in which I left you, I’ll address this letter to you, though it’s meant as well for all the boys in the S-2. (Intelligence section).

“Sort of interested in knowing whether you guys thought I was knocked off — or should I say, whether you remember me or not! I’ll get to that in a minute.

“How are Luis (Mendieta, S-2) and that horn of his? Never got a chance to see him in the hospital, but hope he’s fully recovered. Hope too, everybody’s intact. Learned something from the Jerries about your various movements to France, Germany, and Belgium. Very interesting things they had to say about parachutists in general too.

“When Agee (Capt. James Agee, S-2) said that particular little patrol last November was interesting, he wasn’t kidding. It was — the less said the better, I suppose. (The letter then described the sequence of the action in detail). I emptied the pistol clip at them and pretty soon it was all over, got hit by a mortar shell (dunno whether German or ours) that took a chunk out of my arm and (other parts). The Jerries carried me back that night and operated on me outside of Cleve. I don’t believe they liked us ... they (the Germans) were generally very sympathetic, but they made it clear they didn’t like paratroopers.

“They transferred me from Wesel-am-Rheim to Dorsten, and in December to a prison hospital outside of Dusseldorf ... Anyway I got on crutches by March and on April 17 the Yanks picked me up.

“So now I’m waiting in England, apparently for ultimate shipment to the States ... I’d certainly appreciate a letter. Haven’t received one in about six months. Drop a line, will ya? So much for now. Lots of luck to the gang. Your old sidekick.”
Wes Adrianson’s Thoughts About His Brother

In a letter to John Fielder, Wes Adrianson briefly described his brother’s education and the impact of the unfortunate accident on his family and friends.

“As to Bud’s education it was decidedly varied. After high school he enrolled at Marquette University in the Journalism school, stuck it out for a year, and then switched to Georgetown University in the Foreign Service School in Washington D.C. for two more years. There he polished his capability in the French language but quit that when he decided that was too expensive and returned to enroll in a small school in Ripon College in north central Wisconsin. He enlisted before he got his degree but never made any effort to achieve it even though he was only a few credits short.

“All of this (impact of his death) was soul wrenching to Marian, the three children, my parents, my family and all of his many friends. Marian went back to teaching and eventually remarried. The oldest son, Tim, is a chemist with a large corporation in N.J. He is a very accomplished pianist and musician. Kathy, his sister, has inherited her father’s interest in art. The youngest boy, Scott, is also an accomplished musician and a remarkable guitarist.”

Rollo Morris’s Account

The following is Rollo Morris’s story of his participation in a patrol to help retrieve his buddy Adrianson. (He sent the account to John Fielder).

“On November 3, I was on watch from the top room of the Schuster house (Goebbels’s mother-in-law in Beek), and I watched Adrianson, Mason, Capderoque, O’Neal (I thought it was McNeil) and another go out on that dike in broad daylight. I was amazed, since Germans were entrenched on the far end. The patrol was soon immersed in what appeared to be mortar fire smoke and no more could be seen.
“That night I asked if I could go out to look for Adrianson (we were both in the S-2 – intelligence section), and as it turned out, a patrol of about six of us went out on the dike in the dark. We hadn’t gone far when I felt my right foot catch something, and I was blasted into the air and tumbled down the slope. I vaguely remember somebody else falling and not moving. My left leg was spurting blood, and I knew I had to get help. So I got up and ran back to the road, got tangled in a barbed wire fence, but finally managed to collapse on the shoulder where I hollered for a tourniquet. I was told to shut up, but finally two guys came from the opposite side (where Lt. Polisano was in charge) and helped me back down the road to an aid station where it was ascertained that I had 49 holes, more or less, in my legs, one of which was large and had severed an artery.

“I asked the medics to go back for my boots, but they didn’t. Later, two of us were loaded on the back of a jeep for Nijmegen. Dixon showed up with my old boots.

“While I was trying to make time with a good-looking blonde nurse, they botched first aid on my leg at the M.A.S.H. station. They left a big clot inside, which later resulted in an aneurysm and a complicated surgery in 1947.

“After coming to, I believe in a Nijmegen hospital, I had a shot of whiskey (treatment) and an extra from my neighbor, who was too weak. I looked across the aisle, and there was a guy who turned out to be O’Neal (who subsequently told me Adrianson had been killed). Later, at home, about 1946, I received a letter from Adrianson thanking me for my abortive attempt at rescue. I believe he is the one who told me it was Frenchy who was killed while he (Don) had been sorely wounded and taken prisoner.

“On the first patrol, I am only sure of Frenchy, Don and O’Neal. I think that maybe I saw them all near the house before they left. The name Mason just came into my head
from somewhere ... I don’t know the names of any on the night patrol.

“Mason and Frenchy and maybe others of that group had previously gone AWOL (absent without leave) I thought while in France, because somehow I remember Frenchy going, or trying to go, to the Pyrenees where he had relatives. Anyway, I understood part of the reason for their being on the patrol was that trouble.

“Mason, for some reason, in my memory, appears to me as very young, maybe light brown to blondish hair with fair sun burnish complexion, rather rectangular face, full lipped, maybe 5’9”, fairly husky.”

**About Mason From a Former Member of the 505th**

After a former member of the 505th read about the patrol in the *Static Line*, He wrote me the following letter:

“Stephen Mason’s name leaped out. He was in my platoon, the third of H Company. I remember him in Sicily and Italy, and I think that he went over the hill when we came to the UK. The memory I have of him was that he was very pessimistic, used to sing an obscene little song about the paratroops, which didn’t go along with the self-image most of us had. However, the regiment seemed to be a magnet for individualists and we all liked him. Another man in that platoon was transferred to regimental headquarters’ company, stringing communication wire. He told me a strange story about Mason in Normandy and also about the last patrol. It is amazing to me how many of these things come back after so many years. Mason’s fate will always be a mystery, if the Germans killed him near their positions they would have buried him because of the smell.

“Hope this makes some sense to you and again, I appreciate what you are doing.”
Another Comment About Mason

After publishing the account in the *Static Line* of the ill-fated patrols in Holland, I received a letter sometime later from an H Company trooper, Ray Haener.

“In regard to Stephen Mason, the following is an item I came across in the book by Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldier*, on page 24. ‘Christmas Eve at the Flossenburg POW Camp in Bavaria was a macabre experience. A few days earlier, fifteen American paratroopers, captured in Holland in September, had escaped from the camp. But they were caught on December 23 and returned to Flossenburg. There the SS Guard held a sadistic Christmas party for the inmates who were compelled to stand in ranks and watch as the guards hanged the captured paratroopers.’ The 15 paratroopers who were hung December 23, according to *Citizen Soldier*, had been captured in September.”

Heaner ended by saying “I vividly recall the extreme dread of patrols sent out in Holland, partly because of the minimum cover and concealment in that campaign.”

(The ill-fated patrol actions occurred in November so Mason could not have been among them).

Comments From Russ O’Neal

Russ O’Neal was very reluctant to discuss his memory of the patrol actions but only after the urging of a friend of mine in a rifle company, did he supply further details.

To prepare the patrol for details of the German trench line where German prisoners were to be captured, Russ O’Neal flew over the positions in a “spotter” plane. Looking down he could see the trenches covered over with blankets. There was no sign of activity or movement.

After the third time the patrol was run, “I asked my commanding officer to let me take all of the men on the hill (overlooking the action) and go back out there to get my
men. Two of them were lying in plain sight where they had fallen, I didn’t know if they were dead or only wounded. I wanted to go back out there to get them, and I am sure that if everyone on that hill had gone right out there, we could have killed or captured the remaining Germans without too much trouble. As it turned out, they put me in a jeep and sent me to a field hospital a few miles away and from there to a hospital in England.”

In Russ O’Neal’s account, he mentions another or a fifth member of the patrol, but nowhere does anyone else who participated in the patrols or observed the action, mention or acknowledge the presence of that additional member.

**Conclusion**

John Fielder wrote the War Department and obtained a copy of a letter written to Capderoque’s mother stating that his remains were interred in the Ardennes American cemetery in Belgium. His mother had asked that he be buried in Ste. Mere Eglise, Normandy. She was informed that there were no American cemeteries there.

He also obtained copies of her letters to O’Neal seeking information about her son, and a letter to the War Department expressing thanks for their efforts.

*So ends the story of the Holland patrol.*
It was a difficult childhood for Spenser Wurst, coming from a broken home with a mother who disappeared when he was 13 years old. The lack of a family environment hit him pretty hard and he struggled to establish a new identity. There is no mention of a relationship with his father nor does he indicate if his father was ever present.

Joining the National Guard changed Wurst’s life. Proving to be an able learner, he was promoted to sergeant and put in charge of a light machine gun section. Then appointed as a drill sergeant, he gave selective service inductees basic training. “There was a rumor in the 112th Infantry Regiment that we were going to train another group of recruits for 13 more weeks. I had had enough as a drill sergeant, besides the war might have been over before I got into it.”

Late in the summer Wurst volunteered for parachute school. Demoted, he was transferred in the grade of private. “At that time you had to take a bust to enter parachute school. I was young, adventurous and wanted to be in an elite unit.” He successfully completed his five jumps in the four-week course on 3 October 1942.

Wurst, assigned to the 507th as a rifleman, was then put on a cadre list for the next shipment to a parachute infantry regiment. At that time the Army was activating units and expanding so rapidly that to provide the nucleus of men to the new units, two lists were prepared: one for men to be retained in the unit and the other, a cadre list of those to be shipped out to the newly activated unit.

Even though finally assigned to what he considered to be an “elite” unit, he did not want to miss combat so vol-
unteered in April for overseas duty (“I insisted”). Assigned to a replacement battalion, Wurst was given a designation number of EGB #448 and transferred to F Company in North Africa. But he was too late to make the jump in Sicily.

“Being an EGBer (replacement battalion), I resented some of the BS that they threw at us in Africa and Sicily. No other replacements for the 505th were treated as we were.” His replacement battalion, bivouacked next to the 505th Regiment, trained as hard as the regiment and there was no let up.

Wurst did not dwell on the miserable conditions in North Africa: the hot winds at 110 - 120 degrees with dust storms, water bags hung in the company streets with warm water and atabrine, four or five man tents in company rows, and the ever present dysentery. Training at night, sleep during the day proved difficult because of the heat and dust. To make matters worse, Captain McRoberts busted Wurst from sergeant to private. Wurst has always maintained that McRoberts was prejudiced against EGB’ers.

Wurst remembers a demonstration jump in the desert, “Unfortunately, when the regiment made a mass jump in Africa for some high-powered dignitaries, a ground wind of about 30 miles per hour sprang up. Ordinarily this would be reason to cancel the jump, but due to the political importance it had to go on as scheduled. As a result, there were about 90 jump injuries, 60 requiring hospitalization, and a few so severe they were eventually shipped back to the states. Fortunately the division had brought with it the EGB battalion of replacements and there was no loss of efficiency when these troops were absorbed into the various units where needed.”

He said little about his first combat jump in Italy when the regiment made the drop on the Salerno beachhead. His company was one of those that went on and fought supporting the British along the Volturno River. “In Italy,
especially in F Company, after our hard fight at Arnone on the Volturno River north of Naples, we became deep and lasting combat comrades. With a few exceptions, I value my friendships in F Company as some of the best in my life. For what other reason did we endure the danger and hardships and miseries? Because we couldn’t let our fellow troopers down.”

From Naples, Italy the regiment left on Nov 29, 1943 for a 22-day boat trip to Quorn, England. This would become the base for the forthcoming invasion of Normandy as well as the invasion of Holland. Wurst was promoted to sergeant, and appointed as a squad leader in the 3rd platoon.

Wurst recalled his D-day jump when he was wounded twice in Normandy, talking about those individuals who made the greatest impact on him. “It’s hard to select the most outstanding friends, but I remember Corporal Howard Krueger in Normandy jumping out from a relatively safe position and firing his Tommy gun at a German machine gun that caught me in a wide open field.” Wurst referred to a poem entitled “Death and I”, written by Krueger while in a foxhole on “Hill 131” in Normandy. He was later killed in action in the Battle of the Bulge.

The 505th received orders to attack Hill 131 on July 2 with companies less than 50 per cent strength. The battalions were to attack in column with F Company to seize and secure the crest of the hill. While there was mist, drizzle and rain during the attack, it did help to obscure the regiment’s advance. Mines and booby traps slowed the advance. However it was made easier and faster when someone suggested that they follow a path cleared for a German phone line going up the hill to the outpost.

Wurst wrote, “As F Company, the leading company, moved to the line of departure for the attack, Lt Col Vandervoort, the battalion commander, had already preceded us
and was standing there with his leg in a cast (broken when he jumped) and leaning on a crutch.”

Worst thinks that there were only nine men left in the 2nd platoon at that time and he told of the dead F Company troopers hanging in the trees in Ste Mere Eglise. “It was the saddest sight in my life.” He added, “And also later viewing the drowned troopers in three to five feet of water in the flooded areas. This happened because of heavy loads and entangled chutes. I am crying now, and forever will, when thinking of these sights.”

With the division relieved on 13 July, the regiment made a short hike to the beach. The 505th said goodbye to Normandy as it boarded landing crafts at high tide and pulled away from the shore.

With its jump in Holland on September 17, F Company, as part of the 2nd Battalion, was given the mission of capturing the city of Nijmegen and the southern approaches of the vital Waal River bridges. The following is taken in part from a unit citation for its action:

“The Germans had established strong defensive positions in the park area and for three days resisted efforts to eliminate them. With British tanks in support, the 2nd Battalion attacked on Sept. 19, along the main road to the city in the face of artillery and small arms fire.

“In Nijmegen, the companies fanned out with the main objective to secure the approaches to the highway bridge. Although the lead tank was knocked out by direct fire, the troopers fought their way through the town and flanked the bridge plaza, while Company E commenced a frontal assault. By 1900 hrs. the battalion had closed with the enemy.

“Both sides sent out patrols and used snipers to command the streets. Paratroopers rushed the foxholes and trenches using knives or bayonets in hand-to-hand combat. Fighting continued through the night with both sides
calling in artillery strikes. Burning buildings surrounding the bridge-park area revealed every attempt to penetrate the enemy defenses. By dawn the situation was a stalemate with the enemy still determined to fight. At 0530 hrs. on 20 Sept., the battalion commenced a direct assault. Fighting with every available weapon, the troopers closed with the enemy.”

Here is Wurst’s description of the final assault. “Lt Holcomb (Little Joe) and I left the safety of houses to lead the direct assault across the open streets, into the park at Nijmegen. The survivors of my squad followed me. I was proud!! I glanced to my left and right and saw one of the most inspiring sights of my life. The remains of two parachute rifle companies, companies E and F in an almost perfect skirmish line assaulting dug-in SS troopers with machine guns and rifles at distances of 25 to 150 yards.

“As we had to go prone a few yards into the park because of the intense enemy fire and our heavy losses, Lt Colonel Vandervoort strolled up to me and said, ‘Sergeant better go over and get that tank moving.’ What could I say? Begging him to take cover, I complied with his order. Our dead and wounded lay all around us. We took the bridge, but for what a price in lives and wounded troopers.”

Capt. Robert Rosen, the company commander was killed as he climbed onto a tank to man a machine gun. Lt Holcomb took over the company and was wounded minutes later. Lt John Dodd, leading his platoon, was hit by a 20mm shell and died minutes later. Many Germans chose to die in their foxholes rather than surrender and continued fighting even when their situation seemed hopeless. The battle was not won until organized resistance was eliminated south of the bridge by 1915 hr and British tanks could cross to the north shore. In this engagement, the battalion suffered 82 casualties, but killed 155 of the enemy, captured 91, and wounded hundreds.”
As sergeant at the Nijmegen Bridge, Wurst was awarded the Silver Star for his courageous action and won a battlefield promotion from the battalion commander, Lt Col Vandervoort.

The War Department’s account of the action stated, “The superb achievement of the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in the battle of Nimegen was characterized by high courage, dogged determination, and superior tenacity, and reflects the highest traditions of the U. S. Armed Forces.”

During the Battle of the Bulge, Wurst fought until medical reasons forced his evacuation. After the war he was called back to active duty, serving in Korea and then Germany.

With three combat jumps starting in Salerno, Italy, Wurst rose through the ranks, starting as a private and retiring as a full colonel in 1975. Released from active duty in 1952, Wurst had stayed with the National Guard until he retired after 35 years. During his career and in combat he displayed strong leadership abilities and came away with a deep and lasting bond with his comrades-in-arms in F Company. On April 7, 2000, Wurst was inducted into the Infantry School’s Hall of Fame, Ft Benning, Georgia.
Don McKeage, F Company, sat on his bed in the hospital ward in England, wondering if he could physically make it to town. It was April 1945 and he remembered the intense fighting in the Battle of the Bulge that began at the start of the German breakthrough in December 1944. The fighting had occurred during one of the worst winters in years in the Ardennes forest. He figured it had been about 10 degrees below zero with deep snow.

Evacuated to England, McKeage had been slowly recovering from wounds, frostbite and a loss of 60 to 70 per cent of his hearing — gone forever. He had dropped some 25 pounds.

He groaned trying to move his feet, remembering months earlier while sitting in the snow when taking off his boots, he could see that they had turned the telltale white with blisters. It spelled frostbite in the Army definition. His feet swollen, McKeage was unable to put them back in his boots, so he wrapped them as best he could.

Fragments from a wayward shell had caught him. Most of the fragments missed but some went through his wrist and hand; looking down at the time, he could see that pieces entering one side were sticking out the other. McKeage bandaged them in a makeshift way and walked five miles to the nearest aid station. It was a desperate struggle but he made it.

Placed in a ward of about 35 wounded, most with frozen feet and legs, McKeage welcomed the clean, dry, warm ward, a pleasant change from the Ardennes Forest. Every morning he and the others would roll back their blankets and sheets over their knees. Groups of surgeons moving down the line of hospital beds, checked their feet or legs. Those limbs turning black were removed with the patients
sent stateside. Luckily McKeage kept his — but with limited mobility for the rest of his life.

Recovering in the hospital that April, McKeage decided to take his pass, going to town for the day. After enjoying his outing, he boarded a double-decker bus. Staying in the rear, he started to talk with a nurse from his hospital ward. They stood there, both engrossed in conversation and enjoying the encounter, holding the railing. The bus rounded a corner, hit a bump and lurched. The nurse lost her balance, fell out and skidded across the pavement on her back, hitting her head on the curb. She was killed instantly.

McKeage returned to the ward with the sad news for the nurse’s friends. The day’s horrible experience, added to those of the previous months, overcame him. He went over to his bed in the ward, sat down, put both hands to his forehead and wept in frustration and despair.
June 1994 Recalled

In response to my request, Mrs. Jean Gavin was kind enough to share her personal thoughts and feelings after visiting Normandy and Holland in 1994 for the 50th anniversary of D-day.

Her husband, Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, was the regimental commander of the 505th Parachute Regiment and then commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division during World War II. At the age of 37, promoted to major general, he was one of the youngest men ever to hold that rank. He parachuted into Sicily, Italy, Normandy and Holland. Later, President Kennedy twice nominated him as Ambassador to France.

“Returning to Normandy and Ste. Mere Eglise in June was both a happy and sad occasion for me. Sad because it was the first time without James — but happy too with all the remembrances of the many times through the years we had been there — and happy because my daughters and grandchildren with me shared in all the ceremonies and festivities.

“I am always impressed with the real friendship one finds there, this fifty years later, and it is always wonderful to sense and see the reactions of the young present-day troopers who are there to participate. They have never felt
so welcome and they are doubly proud to be part of the 82nd Airborne Division and its history.

“Somehow though, Holland has always been a special place too -- also with great memories of past visits, a notable one being the time that James and the Queen (Holland) buried a time capsule -- and it won’t be too many years now before it will be time to open it! -- perhaps some of my grandchildren will attend.

“The Dutch have a wonderful way of understating things -- and I think the monument in Groesbeek (General Gavin) speaks to that. It is very simple but very effective and I like it very much. What a moving experience it was to unveil it on June 12 and to have my daughters and of course Eve, my granddaughter -- she loved every minute of the day, long as it was.

“I thought the planning and thoughtfulness that went into that day spoke volumes about how the Dutch too feel about the 82nd and of course, especially the 505th. For those of us fortunate enough to participate in that moment of history, it shall be a day we shall never forget -- and after the cold and rain of Normandy, the beautiful day was a blessing.

“The 50th Anniversary of D-day was an experience of a lifetime but underlying it was the wonder, and also the reality, that fifty years later the impact of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 505th during WW II has left lasting friendships and the admiration of the division, not only in France and Holland, but Belgium and England. No small feat that -- I don’t know of another division that has such an impact and legacy.” Source: 6
The Morale Builder

Periodically during WW II, many of the units published newsletters of their campaigns, individual exploits and humorous anecdotes. While the *Static Line* didn’t have the fame or circulation of the Army’s national newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, it proved to be a great morale builder for the 505th and was always received with much enthusiasm.

There are a few humorous excerpts that recall the somewhat shaky but successful start of the *Static Line* near the end of the war. Each of the paratroop regiments had their own newspaper and the best of these was the 505th *Static Line*, published irregularly and under strange circumstances.

One issue had been printed in Belfast and it was necessary for the editor to wear civilian clothes, spending three weeks hiding out in the Irish Free State, while the Gaelic printers set his paper and ran it on their presses. This set a precedent and no *Static Line* after the first blarney edition could be gotten out in less than three weeks. The Victory Edition took four weeks, the editor convincing the commanding officer that Paris was the only place that the job could be done well and inexpensively. He told the colonel he knew a printer there who could speak perfect English, and furthermore they could have it printed in two colors. The colonel was wary.

When they arrived in Paris members of the staff were on their own as long as they kept their noses clean and reported in every day or so. Not satisfied with the enlisted men’s hotel, as it was too far away from the printers, it was agreed to move to a rooming house with liberal notions about renting and various other activities. In spite of all this diversion, the next *Static Line* was one of the best yet and the staff was commended for a job well done. Source: 28
CHRONICLE SIX

Harley Scott
Regimental
Headquarters Company

“In his famed novel about the Civil War, the great American author explores the face of war itself. He leads the reader into the war experience thru the eyes of Henry Fleming, a young recruit who desperately wishes for his wound; his red badge of courage. What Henry learns instead is the price to be paid in blood and in bone and mortal conflict.”

From The Red Badge Of Courage by Stephen Crane.

Sergeant Harley Scott is the “Everyman’s” profile of a paratrooper, surviving four combat jumps, wounded in Holland and participating in the Battle of the Bulge.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Scott tried twice in mid-February, 1942 to enlist in the Navy but failed because he was color-blind. “Ironically, the color charts had been invented by a Japanese.” However, Scott was accepted in the Army and sent to Ft McClelland, Alabama for basic training — there were no color tests. “I was given an Enfield rifle that was an English relic from WW I. Others were issued the Springfield 03, also from WW I.”

Scott, finished with basic training, was sent to the Edgewood Arsenal near Baltimore, Md and assigned to the Chemical Warfare Center. “Here I am, stuck in a laundry; treating uniforms with a resistant against a gas attack.” Recognized as a hard worker and organizer, Scott was promoted to corporal, and then quickly to platoon sergeant.

Scott said, “I had one poor soul who just couldn’t learn.” Spending many hours after-duty with instruction in close-order drill, Scott gave the man a broom to use as a rifle, painting the toe of his left shoe in gold as a training aid.
This worked fine until the Captain called for a company formation. “The poor soul showed up with his broom and gold toe. His war was over and back home he went.”

Scott desperately wanted out. After appearing before an Officer Candidate Board, he was disappointed to learn that he had been rejected because of his educational background. Then he volunteered for the paratroopers. The Captain was so irritated about Scott’s leaving that he physically ripped off his staff sergeant’s stripes before sending him on his way as a private.

In “A” stage, the first of four, Scott managed to successfully survive the intense physical training at the Parachute School, Fort Benning, GA. In “B” Stage, Scott saw a man freeze in the door of the 35-foot tower. After much effort and finally pried loose, the man ran back up the tower to gamely try again. Again he froze in the door, refusing to jump. He was a washout.

In “D” Stage, the last week, stands out in Scott’s memory. “We always did things alphabetically. When I started in “A” Stage, it was in sequence: Scott, Scott, Sebbins, Scott. I was the third Scott. The next stage it was Scott, Sebbins and Scott. After “D” Stage there was only one Scott — me.” He was awarded his silver parachute wings on January 2, 1943.

After Parachute School, Scott attended the three-month communication course at Ft. Benning. There he made strong friendships with Ralph Ward and Tony Vickery, both in the 1st Battalion and later killed in action in Normandy.

Sent overseas as a replacement on April 25, 1943 aboard the USS Washington, Scott was assigned to a parachute replacement battalion designated as EGB 429. Encamped on the hot, stifling desert in Oujda, near the Algerian border and next to the 82nd Abn Div and the 505th, the replacements were trained as a battalion. Scott remembers, “Running with rifles and field pack over the rocks...
and large stones on the hard pan. One time I got so mad at all these punishing runs, I was seriously tempted to hit our lieutenant with the butt of my rifle for doing this to us. Wouldn’t that have helped my military career?”

About June 29th, 1943, Scott was told to report to the 505th where they needed a radio operator in the regimental headquarters communications platoon. Greeted and welcomed by Master Sergeant Hill, Pvt. Scott was just in time for the regiment’s first combat jump in Sicily, July 1943. He didn’t know anyone in his platoon but remembers that he was both scared and proud to be there. “It was actually the second day after the jump before we met up with a group of any size.” Scott was given the job of operating the generator for the SCR 384 radio.

In a few days they entered Gela, then continued along the coast where there were skirmishes with Germans and Italians. The latter would fire a few shots over their heads. “We would fire back, then they would stand up with their hands in the air. They quit, had had enough, and wanted to be prisoners and go to America. Some of them even had their suitcases with them.”

After the Sicilian campaign, the regiment returned to Kairouan, North Africa, then back again to Sicily where they set up camp in Castlvetrano. Near the airport, Scott remembers seeing “this gigantic airplane, obviously German, on the far end of the airport. A description of it would probably be dismissed as an exaggeration or a hallucination. It was huge, of tubular welded construction covered with fabric. There was room in it for at least two 6x6 trucks or a couple of platoons of men. It had six huge engines. I was told it was some sort of a glider that had to be towed up into the air when the engines would take over. For years, I couldn’t find anyone to confirm what I saw.”

One of the G Company members, Bill Bishop, did confirm the existence of such an aircraft parked on an airfield in Sicily, writing, “While in the advance party, I walked all
Harley Scott

over this huge power glider. You could stand upright under the first motor, had to bend over for the second motor and then crawl under the third motor. When the Germans tried to remove the aircraft to Italy, the U.S. Air Force shot them down. The aircraft could haul a tank or 200 men. What a sight to behold! We had nothing to compare with it. The power glider had to be towed off by a bomber. Could maintain a level flight, not much climb.” Pete Price of the 82nd provided photos and an article outlining the aircraft’s history. He wrote, “I think Scott saw the German ME 321/323.” See endnote.

Scott remembers the jump in Salerno, Italy on September 14 when his aircraft blew a tire while taxiing along the runway. “Here we were, about twenty troopers all loaded with gear, dodging propellers, running towards other planes only to be told, ‘Get the h – out of here.’ Everyone finally found a different plane.”

After the regiment settled in Naples, two battalions were committed to help the British along the Volturno in the North. Scott and others from regimental headquarters company were sent along as perimeter guards and given a bazooka. Finally relieved and waiting to be sent back, Scott remembers sitting on his helmet in the rain and mud, “With my rifle upright and my shelter half-draped over it, and me, tired, wet and miserable.”

Back in Naples, Scott was put on a burying detail to recover the bodies of an officer from the 319th field artillery battalion and Lt. Connel from F Company, 505th. They went by truck to someplace near the Volturno River. There they found the bodies, buried them and marked the graves with dog tags and helmets. Scott said, “I will never forget that.”

Sailing from Naples, Scott remembers sitting on the ship’s fantail watching the stern go up and down. The propellers turned as they cleared the water and then the
A MATTER OF PRIDE

ship would go down with the stern almost awash. “Vince Triner was so seasick he couldn’t eat for days.”

Arriving in Cookstown, Ireland we were billeted in huts, about 30 men each. The two stoves per hut did little to heat the Quonsets during the long winter months and there was never enough fuel. During December, Scott noted that the wooden bed supports kept disappearing — excellent for firewood.

Scott was promoted to PFC. “It was posted on the bulletin board and I read it over and over. You’d think I made Major General. But it had been a year since I had a rating.”

Arriving in Quorn, England, training started immediately. “The usual punishing calisthenics started with running or double timing about five miles out and back. Most of us made it without incident but I recall Jerry Huth never finished. He would run the first two miles or so, then fall out and wait until we turned around and came back. Then he would rejoin us to finish the run. Now Jerry was a pretty heavy guy for a paratrooper, so running was really tough on him. He was never punished for it. I think he knew he could get away with it. He was a great guy and still is."

“Training continued every day, broken only when we would set up radio networks, with two or three teams in the field about half a mile away.”

Waiting for D-day, Scott said, “Some of the guys had a tough time with this. I remember very distinctly my best buddy Ralph Ward saying that he wouldn’t be around much longer.” The two agreed that if something happened to the other, the remaining one would tell the parents.

Jumping on D-day, Scott doesn’t remember exactly where he landed but thinks it was near Neuville-Au Plain. “I landed in a pasture with cattle grazing. But the field had the Rommel asparagus anti-airborne obstacles.” He was
reassured seeing the cattle there, knowing the field was not mined.

Scott remembers seeing me on the ground as the first person after the drop, then Ernie Blanchard, Capt John Boyd, Captain Talon “Woody” Long, M/Sgt Elmer Ward, and Cpl Bill Barnett, all regimental headquarters company.

As radio operator for Col Ekman, the regimental commander, Scott came to respect him and admired his leadership abilities. He rotated as radio operator with Jerry Huth and Bill Barnett, carrying the SCR 300 backpack with its long 10 ft antenna. Once while carrying it, Scott started to draw sniper fire. Someone hollered, “Take the antenna down.” Seeing where the sniper fire was coming from, Scott, using his M1, took careful aim, fired and then saw a German with a rifle and telescopic sight fall out of a window. Another time while Col Ekman was conferring with a company commander, a trooper in a squad that was halted at the side of the road, accidentally pulled the trigger of his rifle with a grenade launcher. It tore out a large portion of his left forearm. Scott said, “He looked at us and started to cry.”

Scott also operated the much larger, four-legged, longer range SCR 284. It required two men with its manually operated generator and was used to communicate in a different network with division headquarters and the other divisional regiments. He also served as a rifleman at various times.

On D-day while laying wire to the 1st Battalion on the road towards La Fiere Bridge under small arms fire, Scott lost his best buddy, Ralph Ward. Telling Scott and George Nelson to hold up while he reconnoitered ahead, Ward was killed when a mortar shell hit him in the back. The two had gone through jump and communication schools together and made the trip overseas on the same ship.
Once, out-posted in a small shack with George Nelson, they happened to see a large cask of "cider." "It sure had a real kick and I'm glad there were no Krauts around at that time."

With Normandy over, Scott returned with the regiment to Quorn. "I saw my old buddy, Johnny Mosier, who was in the 2nd Battalion. He missed Normandy because of an injury sustained during a practice jump. He was so glad to see me that he actually hugged me. Mosier, in the message center, had seen casualty reports coming in every day, Ralph Ward and then my other best friend, Tony Vickery. He just knew that my name would be on the next list. I fooled him."

The regiment had several missions cancelled for the jump in Holland but finally on 17 September the unit marshaled at the airport. "Cannon Ball" Krause, who had been promoted to Lt. Col and moved from the 3d Battalion, was now the regimental executive officer and jumpmaster of plane number four with Scott as his radio operator.

Near the DZ, ack-ack found its mark on their aircraft with some of the shrapnel penetrating Scott's right leg. The starboard engine caught fire. "Fortunately, we were near the DZ (drop zone) and everyone including the crew got out safely."

Scott had this to say about the regimental commander, Lt Col. Ekman, "He was a West Pointer, and knew his work. Unafraid, he never seemed overwhelmed, always in command of the situation, then made a decision and gave his subordinates concise instructions. I had the greatest respect and admiration for him, as did all the officers under him. Much like his predecessor, Col James Gavin, he was not afraid to go up to the front lines and see the situation for himself. Even though he gave me h- one time when the radio batteries went dead. Like it was my fault."
On September 25 Scott was promoted to corporal and then, “After nearly two months, we were finally relieved by Canadian troops.”

During the Battle of the Bulge, Scott volunteered to go on a five-man patrol to gather information. Penetrating the German outpost, he managed to kill a German. He said, “A Lieutenant got a Bronze Star for the patrol action that he wasn’t on.”

While a radio operator for Col. Ekman, he remembers seeing the dead American soldiers that had been caught in shellfire in the disastrous battle in Hurtgen Forest where eight divisions had fought. Approximately 120,000 Americans, plus individual replacements augmenting that number by many thousands, fought in the battle. More than 24,000 Americans were killed, missing, captured and wounded. Another 9,000 succumbed to the misery of trench foot, respiratory diseases and combat fatigue. In addition, some 80,000 Germans fought in this battle and an estimated 28,000 of them became casualties. Historians claim that those who fought in the Battle of Hürtgen Forest fought a misconceived and basically fruitless battle that could have, and should have been avoided. This is the real tragedy of that costly battle.

Later after the Bulge, visiting the German concentration camp in Wobbelin, Scott said, “One of the most terrible sights I could ever imagine.” During World War II, German Nazis imprisoned about 7 to 8 million people, mostly European Jews, in 22 concentration camps. By 1945 they had murdered about 6 million of the inmates. Some were killed by firing squads, others died of starvation or as a result of experiments performed on them by German doctors and scientists, and most died in poison gas chambers. When Allied forces liberated the camps in 1945, they found them littered with thousands of unburied dead, and the majority of the survivors were suffering from disease or starvation.
Later it was learned that elements of the 82nd located near a concentration camp required the villagers in the town to parade in single file around the graves and view the remains of those who had been killed.

Returned to the United States and released from active duty, Scott highly motivated, started as a draftsman, attended night school and earned a degree in Civil Engineering. After more hard work he became a design engineer in steel and a Registered Professional Engineer.

In 2003 he died after a bad fall from a stepladder. Source: 27

Endnote: Further research confirmed the existence of the huge German glider. Larry Maxton in the 82nd Abn Division wrote, “The problem of getting it airborne was the lack of a tow plane that could do the job. The solution was to use three twin-engine aircraft all pulling at the same time. If you can imagine problems — pilots not coordinated, loss of power in one engine. Once converted to a powered aircraft it could fly on its own but at a slow speed. Many of these were shot down while trying to fly to North Africa. The powered version had about 20 wheels on its main landing gear.” Maxton added that the museum at Fayetteville had photos of the ME 321/323.

Initially designed as a glider, it turned out to be one of Germany’s most unusual designs during WW II. The Germans, flush with victory after the fall of France, conceived the glider-type aircraft as a quick and efficient means to move and transport large number of troops, tanks, and guns across the channel for an invasion of the United Kingdom. At the time of production, it was one of world’s largest planes with a wingspan of 180 feet and a capacity for loads up to 44,092 pounds; almost double its empty weight. It could carry an estimated 200 troops.

By comparison, in the mid-1940s, Howard Hughes was awarded a Federal contract to build the largest airplane ever constructed. Hughes and his staff produced a reconnaissance plane (for wartime photographic surveillance) built primarily of wood. Many people doubted that the enormous, cumbersome plane could actually fly. But in 1947, during what was to be a ground-only demonstration of the seaplane, Hughes surprised onlookers by flying the “Spruce Goose,” as it was known, for 60 seconds. While the plane was developed too late for wartime use, its brief flight was one of the most famous in history. The airplane, which was never flown again, still holds the record for the largest wingspan at 319 ft 11 in. Source: various aviation websites.
The Camembert Minefields
(A WW II footnote)

Legend has it that an inhabitant of Camembert in Normandy, one Marie Harel, invented the cheese that bears the village’s name. A priest reportedly gave her the “secret” of its manufacture. During the French Revolution (beginning in 1789), all Roman Catholic priests in France were required to swear allegiance to the newborn republic. Those prelates who refused were executed or forced into exile. Some chose to hide in the countryside while waiting for better days. In 1790, during the month of October, the Abbe Charles-Jean Bonvoust supposedly sought refuge with Marie at her farm. He came from the Brie, a region near Paris famous for its cheeses. In return for the shelter she offered him, he gave to Marie the “secret” of making Camembert cheese.

A nice legend, but the region was famous for its cheeses well before the birth of Marie Harel in 1761. In 1890 the now-familiar small round wooden container was invented — and Camembert cheeses were exported throughout the world!

To protect against the allied invasion during World War II, Hitler gave Field Marshal Rommel the responsibility to build and supervise construction of the Atlantic Wall, a series of fortifications, gun emplacements and minefields along the Normandy beaches. The minefields were marked with signs and placed in pastures along and facing the beaches.

The minefields were well placed but they took their toll on the cows. The farmers visited the German high command and informed them that if they wanted to continue to enjoy the Camembert cheese, the troops would have to quit killing their cows. The Germans, who enjoyed the
fine Normandy cheese, agreed with the Norman farmers and took the mines from many of the pastures. The Germans continued to enjoy the cheese with Rommel quite satisfied when he inspected the coastal defenses, seeing the minefield areas with the signs *Achtung! Minen!* He complimented his command on the fine job they were doing.  Source: 29
Joe Meyers, D Company

Joe Meyers (“JJ”) joined the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in time to make his first combat jump in Holland. Serving as a rifle platoon leader and then as company commander in three European campaigns, he was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge and was always known for his 110 percent effort.

On 29 December 1941, enlisting at the age of 19 in the US Army Air Corps at San Antonio, Meyers was shipped to Paine Field, Texas. There he experienced his first taste of violent death when a P-38 coming in low above the post theater, hit the ground about 100 yards from Myers and then flipped over, killing some men nearby. With the aircraft upside down and on fire, Meyers tried in vain to pull the screaming pilot out but the fire was too intense.

Meyers was initially classified as an aircraft mechanic and assigned to a maintenance unit. Finding this a “rag tag outfit,” he requested a transfer to the infantry but an assignment to the military police for 30 days and then reclassification as a sheet metal worker were too much for Meyers. His only out seemed to be the Officer Candidate School. After appearing numerous times before selection boards, his request was finally approved.

JJ started in officer candidate class #208 at Ft Benning, Georgia on 6 December 1942. His objective had been achieved; if he failed, he still would be a NCO in the infantry. Meyers has always marveled at how the Infantry School could train so many platoon leaders so well in such a short time. At one point during OCS, “My rating was so low that I was told to improve or pack my bags.” He redoubled his efforts and on 10 March 1943, JJ became a
2nd lieutenant assigned to the 303rd Infantry, 97th Infantry Division.

Describing jump school, Meyers remembered his apprehension jumping from the 34-foot tower and the long time it took to pack his first chute. “Packing the chute for the last jump took only 30 minutes.” Meyers completed his fifth jump at night. Landing and rolling up his chute, he double-timed with helmet and M1 rifle for five miles to the finish. On April 8, 1944 General Gaither presented him with his wings. “We could now tuck our trousers into our jump boots,” the distinctive uniform of a paratrooper.

After Jumpmaster School Meyers was ordered to Ft Meade, Maryland for shipment overseas. Reporting to a lieutenant colonel, he was told that a packet of 250 paratroopers was refusing to accept orders from anyone except an airborne officer. Without hesitation or formal orders, Meyers assumed command of the provisional unit, making the train trip with the 250-man packet to Miles Standish, near Boston, for shipment overseas.

Meyers and the 250-man contingent made the voyage aboard the USS Wakefield without a destroyer escort because of its ability to outrun German subs. Upon arrival, the 250 troopers were put on a train, stopping temporarily at Bristol, England.

A few days later, they reported for assignment to the 505th at Quorn, England. Jim Agee went to the S2 section, Nick Psacki to E Company as platoon leader, Art Draper to the light machine gun section as assistant platoon leader, and Meyers to D Company.

The three battalions were designated the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd but the 2nd Battalion was called “Vandervoort’s Battalion,” reflecting the forcible leadership of the battalion commander. Lt. Wray, company executive, who met and greeted Meyers, introduced him to 1st Sgt John Rabid. Wray then assembled the company officers: 1st platoon,
McClean asked Meyers, “What do we call you?” Meyers said, “Jim.” “We have too many Jims, your name is Joe,” So Meyers was introduced to the company commander, Capt Taylor Smith, as “Joe” and kept the name from then on. Meyers became assistant platoon leader to McClean.

Charlie Qualls, “the resident giant,” apparently had an old score to settle with the regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel “Cannon Ball” Krause, who had previously been the company commander. JJ writes that Qualls returned from the pub one night with more than enough under his belt, stationed himself outside Krause’s tent and shouted, “Come out here you SOB.” Krause did not appear.

JJ remembers an incident that occurred before the invasion of Holland when General Ike during the course of his pep talk before the Division said, “I know that you are anxious to get back in combat.” There was a ripple of laughter. JJ, who was near the front of the stand, could see that the General’s neck and face had reddened somewhat.

JJ also recalled that while the regiment continued its intensive training for the invasion of Holland, General Ridgway assumed command of the XVIII Airborne Corps, Jim Gavin received his second star, becoming the youngest major general in the Army and Bill Ekman was promoted to full colonel.

When OB, JJ and Tom McClean paid visits to the nearby Bulls Head pub in Quorn, it was McClean, “the silver-tongued Irishman,” who always managed to get Mary the barmaid to come up with extra glasses of the hard to get Scotch. JJ said the canine mascot, “Erbert,” never lacking for beer, was “so ugly he was beautiful.”
Holland

With the regiment marshaled at the airport after numerous cancellations of a drop, caused by General Patton overrunning the objectives, OB, JJ, and Tom McClean were resting with their backs to the hanger. Suddenly OB said, “Get up and get away from me.” They moved away while OB replaced the safety pin on his Gamon grenade that had accidentally become armed.

At the airport, Lt. Waverly Wray told JJ that he had his 23rd birthday coming up but didn’t think that he would make it. JJ attempted to reassure Wray. “It turned out he was right and I was wrong.”

On D+2, linked up with the British, D Company attacked towards the rail yards. Coming under fire, Wray said that a German tank was holding up the advance, so he took a rocket launcher team plus a squad, telling JJ to cover him. It was then that Lieutenant Michelman was wounded. Pvt Jacob Herman came up behind JJ, who shouted for him to get down but Herman didn’t move; he had been shot through the forehead. Cpl. Jerry Weed, part of Wray’s group, arrived and hit the ground. He told JJ that Wray had been killed. Michelman couldn’t move. To prevent further casualties, the men withdrew. JJ, returning that night, couldn’t find Michelman but later learned that he had crawled to safety and eventually was taken to an aid station.

Here is Jerry Weed’s account of the action:

“Lt Wray told me to get a bazooka team and said we would scale the embankment to the railroad tracks, get on the other side of the tracks, get behind the tank and knock it out with the bazooka. We got up to the tracks ok and could see a lot of Germans on the other side. I thought Wray would order us back to the street but he motioned us ahead and we kept crawling towards the railroad bridge. I don’t know what he had in mind because there was no
way that we could have crossed the tracks without the Germans seeing us. I probably was about ten feet behind Wray when I saw him rise up and heard a rifle shot and he dropped down. The bazooka team was back about fifty feet. I crawled up to Wray and saw that he was shot through the head and knew he was dead. So I ordered the bazooka team back down the embankment and told Meyers what happened. Fortunately the Germans had retreated and we had no trouble bringing Wray’s body back.”

On D+3, JJ said that during the attack on the railroad bridge, McClean was severely wounded in the arms and chest and was evacuated.

**Battle of the Bulge**

In the Battle of the Bulge that followed, JJ incurred a shrapnel wound that he considered minor. A runner reported that mortar fire had wounded both 1st Sgt Rabig and Capt. George Carlson, so JJ took command and continued the attack.

Nick Psaki, E Company, who was distributing Christmas turkeys from a German half-track, managed to survive after the tank was blown up.

On January 4, resuming the attack JJ said that Russ Parker was shot off the deck of an M4 tank while manning a 50 cal. machine gun. Also Lieutenant Case, F Company commander was wounded and, “for a time the company was under the command of the 1st Sgt.”

JJ reorganized the company, making Tommy Rogers the 1st sergeant and assigned two new officers to the 3rd platoon with an experienced sergeant.

During the firefight, Lt. Col. Vandervoort, battalion commander, crawled over to JJ to see if they could muster a reserve. He said that he had about six men. “Give me about five minutes to get in position, then make an assault with the platoons and company headquarters. I’ll flank them
with the Battalion staff.” The attack was carried out with the battalion commander wounded and losing his eye. JJ said that Col. Vandervoort was a true warrior.

JJ said about 138 enlisted men were present for duty when they left Suippes on 16 December. Twenty-five days later the strength was approximately 38.

D Company had a new commander, Captain William Martin and two new lieutenants. Because there were no replacements, the 3rd platoon was not manned and the mortar squads were formed into one section.

JJ, given an R & R (rest and rehabilitation) leave in Paris, wrote that he couldn’t help but notice the difference in comfort and safety between the front lines and rear areas. Returning to the company area, he laid down on the cold, wet ground for some sleep. Later on, as he came in contact with various infantry units, he noticed that their headquarters units and leaders were positioned well behind the front line while the airborne type unit headquarters and leaders were always up front with their men.

Later in the war, on the way to the British Zone in Germany, the 40&8 that JJ was riding in became derailed. Troopers jumped out in time but JJ suffered injuries that required his hospitalization. In gratitude for JJ’s gift of a liberated P-38, the hospital commanding officer provided an ambulance and driver for Meyer’s transportation to the 505th, some 100 miles away. There JJ learned that the Elbe crossing had been made.

The regiment was relieved and sent back to Epinal and then to Camp Chicago where those with sufficient points were processed and homeward bound. JJ, not having sufficient points, went on to Berlin with the 505th to serve in occupation duties.

There, Col Ekman told JJ to organize “America’s Honor Guard” and appointed him as its commanding officer.
The proud moment for Meyers was leading D Company up New York’s 5th Avenue for the Victory Parade. Tom McLean and OB Carr, both recovering from wounds, cheered him on from the sidelines.

Joe Meyers, a true professional who rose through the ranks to colonel, was inducted into the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School’s Hall of Fame at Ft. Benning, Georgia after WWII. His name was also added to the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association’s role of distinguished members. Source: 6
The Look - Alike

An officer in D Company, about 6 feet four inch tall, a huge man with fists like a ham and bullnecked, made his mark on whatever he did and was always ready for a good fight. A good leader, he conducted himself well on the battlefield. With the appearance of Boris Karloff, some said that he was so ugly he was beautiful.

After the combat jump in Holland on September 17, the company commander was told that the lieutenant, seeing a German soldier hurriedly bicycling towards him, stepped around the corner behind a building. As the soldier went past, the lieutenant kicked the bike, sending the bike and the soldier sprawling on the ground. The German soldier looked up at the towering figure, and sensing the inevitable in his prone position, raised his hands to surrender. But, after one glance at the Frankenstein look-alike, he put his hands together and prayed.
Bob Gillette
Regimental
S-2 - Intelligence Section

Bob Gillette, quiet and unassuming, is good at everything he does. During one of the campaigns, the regimental commander offered him a battlefield promotion but he turned it down.

Gillette made all four combat jumps and was responsible for preparing intelligence reports for the signature of the regimental commander. As the senior non-com in charge of the regimental S-2 section, he provided the stability and continuity that kept the section together and functioning in spite of the high number of officer turnovers.

“My claim to fame was the publicity that I got for jumping into Sicily on my 23rd birthday. I was in Colonel Gavin’s plane jumping number three so it was well covered by the Stars and Stripes.”

The history of the 505th Ready relates that John “Beaver” Thompson, war correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, jumped last in Gavin’s stick of 18 troopers. After much searching, he found neither his jumpmaster nor the equipment bundle carrying his battered portable typewriter. Thompson ran into Gillette later that night, discovering to his astonishment that Gillette had located the equipment bundle and obligingly brought “Beaver’s” typewriter along.

To go back to the beginning, at the time of Pearl Harbor Gillette was working for a telephone company in Forest Grove, Oregon. Having completed two years of college, he marked time — mainly figuring out how to save money to complete schooling. “I was registered for the draft but within three months many of my compatriots had already left, so I began looking for a role.”
The Navy and the Army Air Corps quickly discovered his lack of color perception. Then, “A Marine recruiting sergeant wearing glasses cut from the bottoms of fruit jars dismissed me saying they only accept perfect specimens.”

“I suppose the movie ‘Parachute Battalion’ whetted my interest in the paratroops — in any case I just plain volunteered. That put me in the Army on March 23, 1942.”

At Camp Roberts, CA, assigned to the communications and intelligence battalion that specialized in map training, he met Rollo Morris, Doug Gabriel, Ed Stanley, and George Dixon. They were to remain together to the end of the war.

Finishing jump school, the five were assigned to the 505th S-2 section in August 1942 under the colorful officer Barney Oldfield who had been a press agent for various Hollywood stars. When he reported for duty, Lt Col Gavin wondered why in the world he would ever need a press officer. Oldfield’s reply, “Because Col. Gavin, you will lead a victory parade up Fifth Avenue after the war.” This prophecy came true.

The T/O&E (Table of Organization and Equipment) for the section was 18 men; “We were more often about 14-15 with several specialists assigned from other headquarters. I became the staff sergeant section leader and continued at that level until all of the staffs were made technical sergeants in 1944.”

The first regimental headquarters company commander was Captain Scruggs. “That made us wonder if we had made a good choice for a military career. However, First Sergeant Elmer Ward kept the world on an even keel. He was really the backbone of the company until he became sergeant major just prior to our going overseas. He remained my idea of what a first sergeant should be.”

Gillette said there were a number of other company commanders, many for very short terms. Among these
were Harold Swingler, Jim Cockrell, John Boyd and Talton Long. “Swingler was well respected and remembered for posting a memo on the bulletin board about the transgressions of some of our men. It closed with ‘maligners will be prosecuted.’ Ever after, when someone erred, we would remind each other that malingerers would be prosecuted.”

The S2 Section participated in all of the practice jumps with the company and completed some of the weapons training. Gillette always admired mortar men and what they did, however as there were no mortars in the company, that training was not available.

Ed Stanley had friends in the demolitions platoon and eventually transferred there. “I guess he just liked to blow things up.”

Gillette pointed out that the S-2 section was pulled in several directions, always subject to the needs and whims of the S-2 officer. This was evident when, “At company formations at roll call, I alone would report ‘all present accounted for.’” When questioned more than once by First Sergeant Elmer Ward, Gillette answered, “(1) they’re helping Prescott decorate the Officer’s Club’ or (2) they are working for Bill Jenks in the regimental darkroom. Needless to say, we were viewed as the second cousins of HQ Company.”

“After Barney Oldfield, the turnover of S-2 officers included Mulcahy, Kellam, Paterson, McGinity, Roysdon, Piper, Gibbons, Kaiser and Agee. There were several others of very short duration. Paterson was S-2 officer several different times and Piper was also with S-3. “After we had had a string of officers, one of the old timers said, ‘Gillette, you’ve trained more officers than West Point.’ After the war I related that to General Gavin. Ever the West Pointer, he didn’t think it was funny.”
Gillette says that he got along well with Agee since they had gone to colleges eight miles apart — Agee at Washington State and Gillette at Idaho. “Agee marched to a different drummer, so it was interesting to be around him. I’m certain that he did a few things that Colonel Ekman never knew about. After the Bulge he said to me, ‘You’ve been here a lot longer than I have and I don’t know everything you’ve done, so write yourself up for a Bronze Star and I’ll sign it.’ My reaction was ‘To h_ with you.’ When I saw the additional discharge points racked up by awards in those final days, I wished that I’d been less humble. Didn’t matter — by then I had enough points.”

It is hard for Gillette to identify those who made the greatest impression on him. Linzee Prescott in his section presented an interesting enigma. As the lousiest “soldier” in the Army, Gillette wondered how Prescott could befriend and develop a mutual respect with the best “soldier” in the Army, Colonel and then General Gavin. “Prescott’s unsoldierly activities were legendary and became better with each telling. Not only was Prescott a premier cartoonist but he also inspired others to do some pretty good art work in a more conventional artistic sense, namely Don Adrianson, Nick Kastrantas and Luis Mendiota.”

While in Belfast, Gillette attended a military intelligence school in London. Several months later, a memo came down with the standings in the class. Gillette had the highest score on the list, which included some officers of significant rank. “Col. Ekman called me in and gave me the results as a memento. That got me off to a good start with him. I admired him as a small unit commander.”

“The broadest swing in impressions of a commander were those of Col Vandervoort. He gave me a dressing down in North Africa on a petty point, on which I considered him to be wrong. It took until after Normandy for me to restore my respect for him as a leader. I later rationalized that the pressures in North Africa of planning for first
combat, the heat and the dust, the jaundice and diarrhea probably had something to do with his demeanor.”

Most of the original men of the S-2 Section made all four combat jumps. “We lost John McGuigan KIA (killed in action) in Sicily (Biazza Ridge) and Max McCoy was hurt and sent home after the jump in Italy. Prescott, Wylen and Drysdale were taken POW (prisoner of war) on a patrol in Normandy. We lost Adrianson POW and Morris (evacuated to the U.S.) in Holland and Madera (KIA as a Medic) in Belgium. This after each had made their fourth jump. Guesten Wollin jumped in Normandy and Holland without ever having made a practice jump. By “VE” Day, Bill Jenks, Ed Miller, Luis Mendieota, Nick Kastrantas, Doug Gabriel and I were the only ones left from the very early days in the U.S.”

Gillette relates that following Africa, Sicily, and Italy, the United Kingdom has to be among the best of times. Even after the misery of the Bulge, Gillette, returning to Suippes, considers the worst of times began when he learned of the losses from the Bulge among the men he had known along the way. Some had been transferred into other units.

“In May 1945 we assumed that we were still potentially in the picture to go to the Pacific. Like so many others, I was ready to come home. With 20-20 hindsight, I have often thought that I should have gone on to Berlin both for that experience and to march in the parade down Fifth Avenue in January 1946. It would have been only four more months -- and I have not yet been to Berlin.”

Gillette was discharged on October 2, 1945 and by the next spring was ready to go back to college. “I wouldn’t
take a million dollars for the experience but I wouldn’t give a nickel to do it over again. Source: 6

Gillette was responsible for creating a voluminous database of 7100 names of troopers who served in the regiment during World War II.
William L. Blank, looking back on his experiences in WW II, said he was reminded of how much the war’s impact had changed his personality. Strong religious beliefs gave him strength, providing direction to his future life. “When I entered the Army I was an unfocused young man with no specific goals and a desire to get away from home where I felt I was unwanted.”

Participating in all four combat jumps and the Battle of the Bulge, Blank was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart. He served in the third platoon as a staff sergeant for the mortar squad during the entire war.

During an attack in Normandy after D-day, the company commander, Lieutenant Jack Isaacs, had Blank in mind when asked if he could continue when all the other officers in the company were either dead or wounded. “My non-commissioned officers were quite equal to the task and we continued the attack.”

Bill Blank volunteered for the Airborne after seeing a newsreel showing parachute training. However, as with many troopers, he had never been in an airplane before but after taking a ride, he was convinced. Shipped to Ft Benning, Georgia, he successfully completed parachute training. Receiving his parachute wings, Blank was assigned to G Company on August 29, 1942 in the Alabama Frying Pan area across the Chattahoochee River.

Those who remember the intensive training in the Frying Pan can relate to Blank’s account. In one instance G Company, leading the 3rd Battalion on a 16 mile march in pouring rain, reached its destination only to learn that
the rest of the battalion had returned to base camp after the first hour. Whereupon G Company moved into a small nearby town, buying everything to eat that didn’t need cooking.

When asked about the impact others in G Company had on him, Blank wrote, “My favorite officer was Jack Isaacs. We served together my entire time. I took out many patrols for him and we became closer as time went on. We seemed to understand each other and got along well. He seemed cool and in charge at all times.”

Blank also added that two other officers who were special to him were Lieutenant Simon (killed in action in Sicily) and Lieutenant Ivan Woods (later wounded). “During our time in Ste. Mere Eglise in Normandy, we were being shelled pretty hard. George Harman and I shared a hole previously dug by the Germans and as Ivan Woods came by a shell whistled over. Ivan dived head first into the hole on top of George and me. We got a laugh out of it after it was all over.”

Blank remembers Phoenix, the sin-city in Alabama across the river, as a place of dubious culture, “one of the most notorious places and you didn’t go there except at great risk.”

He also recalls that on one of the night jumps several troopers were killed when they slipped out of their chutes over a blacktop road. They had mistaken it for the Chattahoochee River that runs between Alabama and Ft Benning.

“The 504th being located in a nearby camp resulted in boxing matches between the two regiments as well as some two-man fights. The 3rd Battalion produced two of the champions, one being Tommy Thompson and the other a trooper from G Company.”

G Company made history when it participated in the first regimental practice jump in Camden, SC. “One jumper
Blank remembered that G Company had about 32 absent without leave and that Lieutenant Francis Meyers, a West Pointer, (not to be confused with Lieutenant Joe Meyers, D Company) replaced the company commander. “The AWOLS were rounded up, put under guard and placed in tents outside the barracks. While trying to escape, two were shot and killed by a G Company guard. The man who shot them was later transferred to the Parachute Engineers.”

**Oujda, North Africa - Sicily**

On April 28, 1943 the division boarded trains for New York Harbor and sailed to Casablanca. From there they moved to Oujda, French Morocco by 40 & 8 trains and by truck. Setting up base camp in the desert proved to be an experience long remembered. “Our kitchens were set up outdoors along with the mess. Every day at mealtime sand storms would blow and the food would be full of sand.”

The 505th moved to Kairouan, North Africa and from there made its first combat jump in Sicily on July 9, 1943. Blank’s stick of paratroopers landed close together. They gathered up a mortar and machine gun, then joined Lt Isaacs and others. Moving to a hill overlooking Biazza Ridge they set up defensive positions, later to be joined by a group from the 45th Division.

It is interesting to note Blank’s assertion that while they witnessed German tanks and trucks going down the road towards Biazza Ridge, “The ranking officer on the hill from the 45th Infantry Division prevented us from firing.” Blank also said that the officer called for Navy supporting gunfire only when “a German tank started firing on a hill between us and the beach.” Blank later learned that he had lost his best friend Alfred Glascock at Biazza Ridge. “It seemed a tragedy that we were not allowed to fire on those
Germans.” Calling in artillery fire on the Germans could have broken up the attack as they moved along the road to Biazza Ridge, thereby reducing American casualties.

The regiment returned to Kariouan, Africa, then it was back to Sicily. The regiment made its second combat jump at Salerno, Italy on September 17, 1943. Watching a dogfight overhead, one of the machine gun rounds went through the leg of one of the men. “He was so interested he didn’t realize that he had been hit until he looked down and saw blood.”

Moving to Naples, Blank suffered from malaria and jaundice and was transferred to a tent hospital. “While there we were bombed by our own aircraft three nights in a row. The first night we lost a number of men, some from the 82nd. My row of tents took two direct hits and we counted fourteen dead. The hospital had not been properly marked.” Blank was then sent to a replacement hospital, but hearing that the 505th was moving out, he managed to catch up and arrive in time to board the ship for Ireland.

The regiment moved to Cookstown, Ireland and then in February 1944 to Quorn, England, its base for the next two combat jumps in Normandy and Holland.

**D-day, June 6, 1944**

Jumping on D-day, Blank’s stick made a near perfect landing, assembling quickly under Lt Col Krause and moving into Ste Mere Eglise, Normandy. “We saw a number of dead troopers hung up in trees and wires. By mid afternoon the Germans tried to retake the town and shelling began about 900 yards in front of me.”

Three of Ron Snyder’s men from the 3rd platoon were hit by tank fire just a few yards behind Blank’s position. “One received a direct hit; that took off both legs. He died later at the aid station.”
On the second day of the invasion, a glider landed in front of G Company positions. “The pilot ran out and dived into the trench we were using. His head never came above ground until the invasion force arrived from the beach. When the first tank appeared to our front, I called for Dinsmore in the trench to tell me if it was one of ours. When he looked, a sniper shot him through the neck and he died shortly thereafter.”

Regrouping, the company moved toward La Hay du Puits and came upon a railroad track on an embankment with a road going through an underpass. Blank raised his head to look across and at the same time a German looked up at Blank. They both ducked down with the German throwing several blue grenades that rolled to the bottom of the bank and exploded. Blank caught him with his Tommy gun the next time the German came up.

Down the road a small German tank was firing at anything that moved. “Col Krause, attempting to return fire, tried to roll out a 75mm pack howitzer but in so doing lost the crew and gun.” The tank then tried to drive through the underpass but was hit by bazookas on either side. However it was able to reverse and backtrack, making its exit.

Blank said they managed to kill a German sniper who had been taking pot shots at them. Arnie Paulson on Blank’s left directed six to eight rounds of mortar fire on some Germans issuing rations, killing eight.

When G Company moved to high ground in front of La Haye du Puits, Marty Scherser, the medic, moved out in an attempt to give first aid and rescue a machine-gun crew hit by a German machine gun. The same gun killed him. Vowing revenge, Fritz Pynson and Blank crawled up a hedgerow and hearing Germans on the other side, fired a shot over their heads. They responded by throwing egg-shaped grenades. Blank tried to fire but his Tommy gun jammed. The two, making a hasty retreat to their
mortar position, managed to lay in a heavy concentration of rounds and were able to take four prisoners.

After G Company was relieved by the 8th Division at La Hay du Puits, “Two of us went down to the town. There were many dead 8th Division men. I believe this was their first combat experience.”

Loading up on trucks, the regiment headed to the beach for their return to England. “We saw Krompasky standing beside the road. He had not been seen since the jump on D-day.”

**Holland**

Returning to Quorn, England after Normandy, G Company received replacements and began training for its next mission. Due to the rapidity of Gen Patton’s advances, the division’s missions were cancelled as he overran their objectives.

Finally the 505th took off for a daylight drop Sunday, September 17 on Nijmegen, Holland, and its fourth combat jump. Landing on Groesbeek, G Company was met by cheering Dutch people wearing orange armbands. As digging-in began along the edge of town, a freight train loaded with Germans caught everyone by surprise as it slowly moved out of the area. There has always been considerable discussion about this incident but Blank said it wasn’t recognized as a threat at the time.

During the Holland campaign, as in previous battles, Lieutenant (then later Capt) Isaacs relied upon Blank’s skill to take out numerous combat and recon patrols. On one occasion, Blank was sent to an outpost to take over after the death of a lieutenant who had been accidentally shot by one of his own men. Told to shoot anyone crossing the tracks, “The lieutenant was in the middle of the tracks when shot as he was returning.”
Another time, Blank took a patrol out at night to capture a prisoner. Spotting German activity, the patrol crawled down a ditch alongside a road with Blank on one side and his men to the rear and right rear. One of Blank’s men began to cough, so two German guards, who had been in the shadows, moved over to check. One guard came down the road, directly in front of Blank, carrying a bolt-action rifle. Blank said he tried to get him to put his hands up but on his third try, the German fired from the hip and started to run. “He was hit 30 times by my Tommy gun and Pinion’s rifle. When the shooting stopped, I looked back and saw all my men running back towards our lines. They thought that I had been killed. I crawled back alone with the Germans taking pot shots without success.” Blank said the next night Cantrell took a patrol out along the same route but it was stopped before they reached the road and one man was killed.

Moving into Nijmegen, defensive positions were set up along a dike called the Poulder. One night the Germans slipped into a listening post in front of the dike and took a G Company man prisoner. The next night Blank was asked to take out a combat patrol and get a prisoner. A sergeant, along with a Dutch underground man, who spoke the language and knew the terrain, joined the patrol. Blank thought he would be a big help but, “He was not much help when I needed him the most.” The patrol started across a bare field toward the dike with the Dutchman, the sergeant and Blank leading the patrol. Coming upon a listening post, a German stood up and said something. The Dutchman hit the ground, threw out a hand grenade with Blank following suit. During the flash of the grenades, the German started to run. “This activity woke up all the Germans in the area who began to fire flares, lighting up the field like a night ball game.” Starting to receive rifle fire from a hedge, they moved towards it, returning fire. “As we got close, a machine gun opened up, just missing my head. I tossed a grenade into their hole and put it out
of action.” The firing stopped but the illuminating flares continued. Blasik crawled over to Blank saying he thought they should get the h--- out of there since they were the only ones left. “One man, a Polish trooper, was dead, the battalion sergeant was injured and could not walk.” Blazek and Blank picked him up and started back to their line. In spite of the flares, they were able to return without further injury. A lieutenant, whose name Blank does not or prefers not to remember, decided to bring up the rear of the patrol. “It was his orders to the men that caused them to leave the four of us out there alone in the first place. He was later transferred to a motor pool job when we returned to the French rest area.”

**Battle of the Bulge**

On November 16, 1944 the Division was pulled back from Holland and transported to Suippes and Sissone, France. There with replacements arriving, the 505th received back pay, cigarette rations and three-day passes to Paris.

One morning, ordered to fall out at 2 am, they learned that the Germans had attacked and broken through the lines in Belgium. So began the Battle of the Bulge. Blank said, ”We were loaded on trucks with full equipment at 1000 am on December 18, 1944 and transported to Werbomont, Belgium.” Blank remembers that in one of their first positions, the company was dug in along the railroad tracks and a river that passed through Grand Halluex. An attack was turned back with the aid of a tank destroyer that knocked out several German tanks after a bridge was blown.

With the action at Grand Halluex, Belgium began the cold and bitter fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. Blank said the next couple of months were spent in continuous attacks and movement through the “deepest snows and coldest weather I have ever experienced.”
Entering the Siegfried Line

The original Siegfried line was a line of defensive forts and tank defenses built by Germany along their border with France in 1916-1917 during World War I. The Maginot Line served a corresponding purpose. The Germans themselves called this the Westwall, but the Allies renamed it after the First World War line.

The second Siegfried Line or Westwall was a defense system stretching more than 630km (392 miles) with more than 18,000 bunkers, tunnels and tank traps. It went from Kleve on the border with the Netherlands, along the western border of the old German Empire as far as the town of Weil am Rhein on the Swiss border. More with propaganda in mind than for any strategic reason, Adolf Hitler planned the line in 1936 and had it built between 1938 and 1940. This was after the Nazis had broken the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaties by remilitarizing the Rhineland.

In late January, the 505th moved to attack the Siegfried Line. “The German resistance was constant and often at close contact.” On the day before Blank’s injury, G Company came to a clearing in the forest and began to receive fire from a hill on the opposite side lined with pillboxes. Ordered to attack the pillboxes, they waded across a creek about chest deep. “We lost one man in the creek but most of them made it across.” There were no indications of activity from two pillboxes. “Three of our men, led by Krompasky, attempted to enter the pill box. They were immediately fired upon by a machine pistol that killed Krompasky and wounded the other two.” Blank crawled to the top of the pillbox and dropped a Gammon grenade down a chimney. “My grenade killed one and forced the surrender of 14. Three 82nd men who had been
held in the pillbox were freed. At approximately the same time MacDonald attempted to enter the other pill box and was shot in the head by a machine pistol.” Blank said that MacDonald was seriously injured but managed to survive.

The next day, February 3, 1945, they were told that they were being relieved. “We marched single file through the forest to cut down on our chances of stepping on a mine. I was unlucky and stepped on one. The medic just behind me was knocked down. Chris Perry, our company medic, came back where I was and took over my case.” Severely wounded, Blank was eventually transported to a field hospital at Spa, Belgium where his left leg was amputated below the knee. From there a train took him to a hospital in Paris.

“When the ambulance door opened, there were more Germans as prisoners than I had seen in one place. I reached for my P38 pistol, which I had between my legs and was prepared to shoot them if they dropped me. They handled me more carefully than anyone else had and I was relieved when I finally got into my hospital bed.”

After a couple of weeks in Paris and some delays Blank was flown to Mitchell Field, N.Y. and then on to Walter Reed Hospital until he was discharged on December 1, 1945. While in the hospital he met his future wife who “provided the right balance to my life” and he credits her with helping him make the needed adjustment to deal with life as an amputee. With the help of a Veterans Administration doctor, he found a position in Civil Service where he worked to improve service and control costs.

Blank wrote, “Sometimes terrible things can provide situations that lead to happy and positive results. God brought me through all the negative and positive aspects of my life and I would have been nothing without him.”

Source 6
Muddy Boots

Chaplains lived and worked with troops, provided strength, courage, help and consolation ... During World War II chaplains earned 2453 decorations with 77 killed. There were 8896 chaplains who served in the U.S. Army and on the day Japan surrendered in 1945, there were 8191 on duty: Catholic 2278 – Jewish 243 – Protestant 5670.

...Chaplains entering jump school faced some of the most physically demanding training. To minister to paratroopers, chaplains needed to bond with men, and jumping with them was the most important way to form a bond ... The “Flying Magazine” identifies Raymond S. Hallas as the first airborne chaplain.

...Overseas chaplains held services in out of the ordinary places - vaults below castles, under trees, and in old bombed-out buildings.
...Chaplain assistants were, in addition to regular duties, carpenters, stone masons, and landscape engineers. Their good humor and patience were a boon to the chaplain’s morale. Source: Partial text from 30

FATHER MATTHEW J. CONNELLY
Catholic Chaplain for the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment

PROFILE OF A SKY PILOT
By Mark Alexander

That’s how they christened Lieutenant Matthew Connelly, 32 year-old Catholic chaplain of the 505th at Ft. Benning, GA., in July 1942.

Born in Denver, Colorado on June 24, 1910, Father Connelly lived in Victor and Pueblo, Colorado during his youth with his twin brother Pat. The brothers lost their father at an early age.

In 1926, Father Connelly entered the Holy Cross Abbey School in Canyon City, Colorado graduating in 1928. After spending a year at St Benedict’s in Atchinson, Kansas, he returned to Holy Cross as a novice, subsequently taking the triennial vows in August 1935.

Father Connelly pursued both philosophical and theological studies at Holy Cross, earning his B.A. degree in history after attending Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado.

Ordained in 1935, he began his pastoral work centering on the parish as well as preaching throughout the countryside.

Father (Lt.) Connelly joined the 505th in July 1942 as part of the cadre, after having gone through jump school at Ft. Benning and earning his wings as a jumping padre or “Sky Pilot.”
Father Connelly made his ninth parachute jump in the invasion of Sicily with the 505th, and then later, combat jumps in Italy and Normandy. His airborne career was curtailed after the Normandy jump caused a serious back injury.

Father Connelly left the Army in 1945 as a Major, receiving the Purple Heart. After his military service, he continued in parish work. Semi-retired during his last years, he was always cheerful and smiling despite his affliction, which compounded from diabetes and resulted in amputation of both legs.

*The following, taken in part from* Ready, the history of the of the 505th, *records some of those times of our regimental chaplains:*

As members of the cadre in those early days of the 505th, Colonel Gavin introduced Chaplains Connelly and George B. Wood during a regimental review as, “two d__ good chaplains.”

In those days the Static Line, a monthly airborne newspaper, often featured columns and pictures that would have caused considerable consternation to any chaplains other than Connelly and Wood, but these two, well aware of the roughshod group they were riding herd on, took it in their stride.

During the 505 campaigns, the chaplains tended to our spiritual needs in many places. Their altars might be in an ambulance, tent, an abandoned building or under an open sky. This was especially true after our combat jump in Salerno, Italy in September 1943, when Chaplains Connelly and Wood held church services in the vicinity of Paestum, “at the pagan altars of the ancient Greek ruins located there.”

During December 1943, while the 505th was in the United Kingdom ... Chaplain Connelly said midnight mass
in the decorated mess tent assisted by altar boys, Majors Kellam and McGinity, and a paratroop choir.

Father Connelly died October 24, 1978 at the age of 68. He was loved and deeply appreciated by the men with whom he served.

GEORGE E. WOOD
Chaplain For The
505th Parachute Infantry Regiment
And the 82nd Airborne Division

Born in 1910 in Biddeford, Maine, Chaplain Wood attended Hobart College and Nashotah House Seminary. He was ordained to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church after receiving the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Divinity. In 1960 he was awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree.

He was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant in the Chaplain Corps following which he attended the U.S. Army Chaplain School at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. While awaiting assignment orders, Chaplain Wood volunteered for parachute duty but on his second qualification jump, he sprained his ankle. During hospitalization, he wrote the Paratrooper’s Prayer still in use, which was also translated in French:

“Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Who art above us and beneath us, within us and around us, drive from the minds of our paratroops any fear of space in which Thou art ever present. Give them confidence in the strength of Thine everlasting arms to uphold them. Endow them with clear minds and pure hearts that they may participate worthily in the victory that this nation must achieve in Thy
name and through Thy will. Make them hardy soldiers of our country as well as Thy Son, Our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Chaplain Wood was the first chaplain to jump in combat, and the only chaplain to make four combat jumps in World War II (Sicily, Salerno, Normandy, Holland). He also participated in the Belgian Bulge in December 1944 and the occupation of Berlin. At the Wobbelin Concentration Camp he arranged for the transportation and viewing at gravesites of the victims and provided full military honors. He served as the 82nd Airborne Division Chaplain from 1942 until 1946.

He returned to Ste. Mere Eglise for the 25th anniversary of the 1944 invasion jump and again in 1972 to bless a stained glass window in memory of those killed in action. In 1984 he participated in a Requiem Mass in observance of the 40th anniversary of D-day. On that occasion NBC News asked him to represent the airborne troopers of the D-day drop, and Tom Brokaw interviewed him in the “D-day Plus Forty” TV special. He again returned to share in the 50th anniversary of D-day, visiting England, France, Belgium, and Holland. He also appeared in the ABC “Turning Point” narrated by Peter Jennings, recalling D-day. Chaplain Wood received many awards and decorations. Source: 6
“The best way I could have started 31 years in the Army.” That’s what Bob Piper said about his assignment to the 505th during WW II. He went on to make all four combat jumps. Wounded once in Sicily, Piper ended his career retiring as a full colonel.

While in a basic class in 1941 in Ft Benning, he volunteered to be a parachutist because of a visit with Major Miley, who was at that time in the 501st Parachute Battalion. Eight months later stationed at Camp Cook, California, Piper received his orders. Setting out from the west coast, he drove to Georgia accompanied by Dale Royston and “Gater” Carter. He qualified as a jumper in August 1942.

Twenty-three years old at the time, he was initially assigned to G Company, later became S-2 and then adjutant of the 505th. He developed a strong association and attachment for the men and officers of G Company. At that time Captain Patrick Gibbons was the G Company commander, with Jack Isaacs (later company commander in Normandy), Dick Wells, Jim Huffman, Tony Asker, Tex Woods, J. Simon and Pat Ward as company officers.

It was “the hard-charging troopers and officers”— Ed “Cannon Ball” Krause, Chuck Post, Walter DeLong, Tony Costell as 1st Sgt and others in the battalion whom he considers as the “best” in the airborne ranks.
“The training was mainly physical with coordinated platoon-sized tactical exercises and night jumps, weekend unit exercises, forced marches and showdown inspections.”

Piper expressed strong feelings and high respect for Lt. Col. William E Ekman, the regimental commander, who had the greatest impact on him. Col. Ekman came to the 505th in March 1944 from the 508th. “Gavin (regimental commander and then the division commander) was good, Krause (battalion commander) was fair, but Ekman was truly the most dedicated, motivated, professional soldier and combat leader — bar none, the 505th ever had in WW II.”

Piper wrote that aboard the U.S.S. Monterey headed for North Africa, “We had eight-hour ownership of a bunk, for each 24 hour period. My roommates were Peddicord, killed in action, Rees, medically evacuated, Rice, killed in action, Buck evacuated and Russell.”

**What About My Mule?**

While training in Oujda, North Africa, the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion practiced with the 75mm pack howitzers in desert areas supposedly cleared of civilians. “The 456th decided to zero in on a house up ahead. They did and blew it away. Shortly thereafter an Arab man appeared and through an interpreter said the house was his, that it had been destroyed. His wife and mule had been killed. He wanted to be paid for his mule - right now! Not for his wife, not for his house, but for his mule!”

As a footnote to Piper’s account, Rick Atkinson in *An Army at Dawn*, wrote, “Jeep drivers twined winter roses around their radio antennas, and pretended to enjoy proffered local cigarettes, soon dubbed ‘Dung d’ Algerie.’ ‘Vivre l’Amerique!’ shouted the Arab children, to mostly British troops. To deal with the inevitable traffic fatalities, a sliding scale of reparations was established, paid in the oversize French currency GIs called “wallpaper”: 25,000
francs ($500) for a dead camel; 15,000 francs for a dead boy; 10,000 francs for a dead donkey; 500 francs for a dead girl!”

“The Captain to Come Aboard!”

Piper recalls an incident that occurred when the 505th sailed from Naples, Italy in October 1943. The *U.S.S. Frederick Funston* was anchored in the outer harbor off Oran without dock space, awaiting a convoy. Capt. Piper and Capt Bill Follmer had been authorized shore leave and were transported to shore by LST (landing craft). The last LST back to the ship was at 11pm. Piper made it, Follmer didn’t. However at 2 am, Follmer did make it to the Harbor Control Officer, “I have a message for the Frederic Funston — Send this message — Captain to come aboard.” The Navy commander who received the message was captain of the *Funston* and he thought it was a Navy captain who wanted to come aboard. He lowered the gig and proceeded with his entourage to the dock to pick up Follmer, a captain in the Army. Piper said the commander was furious. “He did bring Follmer back to the ship, but the rest of the voyage was mighty tough.”

Piper was part of the regimental staff drawing up plans for “Operation Neptune” in Normandy. As adjutant, Piper counted 1094 men and officers at the end of D-day — about half the regimental strength. In Holland Piper remained S-1 but for the Battle of the Bulge he changed places with Jim Agee, heading up the S2 intelligence section.

“As adjutant, Col. Ekman gave me many jobs — one was watching out for Miss Stevens, American Red Cross — getting her work details, putting guards on the officers’ shower Quonset so she could shower. She delivered donuts to companies in the Bulge. Because of her outstanding job, she was decorated with a Bronze Star — not a civilian medal, but when President Truman signed the citation she received a great honor and rightfully so. I add that Steve and I were married in June 1945 in Epinal, France. Went
to Berlin and then the U.S.A. She’s the mother of my four kids and was truly a great lady and military wife.

“The worst of times for me was the Bulge. It had to be the worst — cold, frost bite, feet frozen, food limited, tough fighting for all. The best of times for me was when Col. Ekman gave Steve away at our wedding; General Gavin’s pilot took us to London on our honeymoon and then of course there was the New York 5th Avenue victory parade.” Source: 2
Always interested in and on the lookout for food, Pat Reid, a member of H Company, tells of an incident in Italy about four days after the combat jump in Salerno:

“Our company commander, Captain Mills, had me go with him to the bottom of the mountain for supplies. Just before we got there, as we approached a small home we saw some chickens in the yard. Captain Mills wondered, “I haven’t had any fried eggs in a long time, do you suppose we could buy some?” Whereupon he got out his little book of Italian and English, looking for the translation on how to ask for eggs. Thinking that he had it all worked out, he proceeded to knock on the door.

“A little old lady came to the door and said, ‘Yes, what do you want?’ Captain Mills checked his dictionary and said ‘uovos.’ She then put a frown on her face and again said in perfect English, “What do you want?” Captain Mills repeated ‘uovos.’ She looked at him and said, “What’s the matter man, are you sick?” Captain Mills started to check his book again.

“When I quit laughing, I told Captain Mills, ‘Sir, she is speaking English to you.’ Captain Mills had become so engrossed that it had not dawned on him she was speaking English. We had a good laugh and started visiting. She and her husband had lived in Boston until he retired. His Social Security income wasn’t enough for them to live in the States, so they returned to Italy where they said they were quite comfortable.”

The company commander and Reid did enjoy the fried eggs.
Larry Wiefling  
Headquarters Company  
3d Battalion

It was extremely difficult to extract any information from Larry Wiefling. Finally after several phone calls, the following arrived and even then, when I asked for clarification and more detail, Larry just didn’t want to discuss it.

"I was just 22 years old when I received my greetings letter from F.D.R. After ten weeks of training at Camp Wheeler, GA., I along with eight friends were sent to Fort Benning, GA to begin parachute training. Received my wings 29 Aug. 42 and joined the 505th in the Frying Pan area. I believe Capt. L. Wall was the commanding officer of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion.

“I made four combat jumps. Was wounded in Normandy and again in Holland. I also received the Soldier’s Medal.

“I guess the best of times were in Ireland and England. The worst would have to be our time spent in North Africa.”

Source: 6
Ted Gaweda
505th Parachute Infantry Regiment

I was first assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion two weeks before the 82nd Airborne Division sailed for North Africa, and a lasting impression remains of the troopers in that company, many coming from the Pennsylvania coal mines.

Where did we get such men? One who immediately comes to mind is Tadeuz “Ted” Gaweda, who served in the 505th on five different occasions after the war as well as serving on the board of directors of the 505th Regimental Combat Team Association.

A most unusual person, in a lifetime he went from prisoner in a Nazi labor camp to be the top kick as command sergeant major of the XVIII Airborne Corps.

During an All-American Week at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I asked Ted why after 34 years in the service he chose to retire in Fayetteville, next to Ft Bragg. Without hesitation he replied, “I love the Army and America and what it did for me.”

Born in Poland, October 1933, with the country in the midst of a deep depression and bread lines a common sight, Gaweda lived off the land with his family. They didn’t lack for food as his father owned farmland. Also as a blacksmith, many townspeople worked on his farm in exchange for his services. Gaweda with four brothers and two sisters also went out in the fields doing the farm work.
Gaweda said that his mother was the main force in his religious upbringing. “She wanted one son to become a priest” but that all changed when the Nazis launched their Blitzkrieg and overran Poland. Two days later Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany.

At the start of the war, even at his young age, Gaweda remembers seeing German aircraft flying back and forth over a nearby city, then it was memories of the sight of German tanks arriving to begin the process of rounding up Jews. “Many were executed and buried alongside the road. We were told not to go there but we did anyway and you could see the fresh blood oozing through the sand.” Others were put on trains and taken away.

The relatively quiet period after the Polish army surrendered on September 28, 1939, was changed when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union on June 21, 1941.

The Ukrainians and Poles had existed together in an uneasy peace. The Ukrainians wanting their own independence began an uprising from an ancient feud over land that had previously belonged to Ukraine and had become a part of Eastern Poland. The Ukrainian partisans went on a rampage, wanting to kill everyone. They murdered Gaweda’s aunt and her daughter. Eddie, Ted’s brother, said that they were killing for land, sometimes they would shoot them, other times knife them. “Are you Polish? — We will have to get rid of you.”

Trapped between the fighting of the German army, the Soviet Army and the Ukrainian partisans, Ted’s parents and the eldest sister went to live in a nearby town. “Antoni went underground and joined the resistance. Although only fifteen years old, Eddie then became the ‘man of the family.’ He cooked the meals and watched over his brothers and sisters. The Ukrainians often came to question the family, asking where the parents were; Eddie would only speak their language, never Polish.”
The fighting between the Germans and the Ukrainians became so intense that Eddie decided it was too dangerous to stay on the farm. Led by Eddie, the Gaweda family abandoned the farm and walked to their grandparent’s home, joining their mother and father there.

This changed on Nov. 6 1943 when the Nazi stronghold in Kiev collapsed. The Germans put the Polish people in horse-drawn wagons, with the convoy twice ambushed by the partisans, killing many. Once in the town of Kovel they were jammed into boxcars and transported to Germany.

There were about 100 children on the train. The Germans said that the children should take a pill to protect their health. Instead with whispers, the children were warned. “Pretend to put the pill in your mouth.” Tadeuz kept it in his hand. Later he threw it to the ground. His little sister, Nanda, following her mother’s advice, put the pill in her mouth and then quickly spit it out. The next day, all of the children who swallowed the “medicine” were dead, and their lifeless bodies were hauled away on a horse-drawn wagon.

In a Nazi concentration camp, Tadeuez and his family were rescued by advancing American GI’s, who overran the camp. Sponsored by a farmer, Gaweda traveled to the United States and subsequently tried to join the U. S. Army.

Trying to enlist, Gaweda was turned away by Army recruiters because of his young age. However after working at Polish bakeries in Brooklyn and Chicago, he enlisted in April, 1953 and embarked on a 35-year Army career — four tours in Korea, two in Vietnam, one of which involved inserting intelligence teams behind enemy lines, and combat in the Dominican Republic and Grenada.

Early in his career he became a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division, making some 1,200 jumps. In August 1984, Lt.Gen James J. Lindsay personally selected
him. to become command sergeant major of the Army’s XVIII Airborne Corps, the top enlisted airborne warrior of 84,000 soldiers.

Thaddeus’s wife, Edith, whose family was forced to leave Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland after the end of WW II, met her future husband after fleeing from Communist East Germany through the Berlin subway system.

“The taxpayers sure as h_ got their money’s worth when they paid Ted Gaweda,” one of his superiors said.  

Source 8
Don McKeage
F Company

“For the teller of a war story, the telling gives disordered experience order and therefore meaning; in the telling he finds the man that he was and the war he fought, and how he was changed, and why. For the listener, the story makes huge and terrible events in history assume human faces and human voices, turning the suffering and excitement and the anonymous numbers of the dead into this soldier, at this place, feeling this.”

From “The Soldiers’ Tale” by Samuel Hynes

The memory that Don McKeage holds foremost in his mind is the Victory Parade in New York on January 12, 1946, proudly carrying the company guidon up Fifth Avenue as he marched with the 82nd Airborne Division. He has kept it to this day.

With World War II underway, McKeage joined the Air Cadets shortly after graduating from high school in 1943. Color blindness caught up with him, so unable to join the Army Air Corps, he took the Army route with basic training in Texas. The challenge of the airborne appealed to him, so volunteering, he was sent to the Parachute School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Completing his five jumps, McKeage attended an advanced communication course. Receiving his overseas orders, he arrived in England, then was assigned to the 505th.
The Bulge Begins for the 505th

Returning to its base camp in France after the fighting in Holland, a relaxed training schedule came to an abrupt end on December 17 when the barracks lights flashed on at 0200 hrs. Unit commanders and noncommissioned officers passed through the barracks with a wake up call, “The Germans have made a major breakthrough. Get your gear together and be ready to move to the front.”

The 82nd and the 101st were the only two divisions on the continent that SHAEF (Supreme Allied American Expeditionary Force) had in reserve. The orders to the 505th were simple: “Be ready to move out at 0900 with full pack and combat load.”

Early that morning, McKeage and the rest of F Company loaded onto long semi-trailers, “cattle cars” called by some. They had upright sideboards about 4–5ft high, with options to either stand or sit down on the trailer bed. Helmets were used due to infrequent stops and the lack of facilities.

McKeage said that the regiment had received few replacements; the men had not been issued winter clothing, including long underwear, wool socks or gloves. “We left for the Bulge with our combat clothes and jump boots like we were going on a fall vacation.” So began the Battle of the Bulge for the troopers of the 82nd.

The fact that Hitler’s gamble did fail is attributed in no small measure to the efforts of individuals as well as the courageous action of small units. Historians also note that the immovable defense of the 2nd and 9th Infantry divisions allowed the Allies time to build up and constitute a defense line.

The 82nd was moved into a lightly defended gap of 10 miles. It was here that the 505th was assigned a major portion of the gap and what followed during the Bulge proved
to be the finish for many of the veterans who had been part of the original 505th.

McKeage arrived with F Company at Werbomont, Belgium in the middle of the night after an all day cattle-car ride from Suippes, France. They had traveled northward through Luxembourg, past Bastogne and finally stopped at Werbomont, short of Liege to the north.

McKeage laid down on the ground as best he could, and promptly fell asleep. Awakened early morning, he was told to move out with a small detachment heading east to the village of Trois Ponts on the Salm River. There they were to cross over the river and establish defensive positions for Trois Ponts. The timing was lucky as F Company arrived just in time to save E Company as the Germans had hit them head on, trying to push through. McKeage reported that they “shot the heck” out of the Germans. Both companies managed to pull back and set up another defensive area with E Company losing a number of men during the battle. F Company received a few replacements later that night but by the following morning two of them had been killed in action.

There were many close calls. McKeage remembers the next afternoon when he had dug a slit trench along the top of the hill in high grass and in small brush. “I was busy looking across the valley for better observation but in the meantime my head was too high and offered a good target for a German sniper.” A sniper had selected his position carefully, partially dug in with good observation with a powerful scope that could reach 500-1000 yards. The sniper had already picked off three F Company men.

During World War II, German snipers were rewarded a wristwatch for 50 kills, a hunting rifle for 100 kills and a hunting trip with Himmler for 150 kills.
The sniper saw McKeage peering over the slit trench, patiently took aim and squeezed off a shot. The bullet came close, almost got McKeage, grazing the left side of his neck. “The bullet tore off the back of the collar on my combat jacket.” He hit the ground in a hurry and “when I came out, I was running and only stayed in that hole after dark.”

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Christmas dinner never did arrive. Road conditions, deep snow together with the 12-mile distance to the forward areas where firefights often erupted, all combined to prevent the dinners from delivery. It wasn’t until New Year’s Eve that some broth was brought forward, nothing else. Because the delivery was so precarious, McKeage found out later that division headquarters had so many hams and turkeys on hand and undeliverable that they were taken to a nearby village for distribution.

On Christmas Eve F Company received orders to move out and prepared to clear the area west of Trois Ponts.

Since the start of the German offensive, fighter and bomber aircraft had been unable to fly ground support because of dense fog and lack of visibility. Christmas day dawned and brought with it sunshine and excellent visibility. Along the line the troops cheered as one as the Allied fighters and bombers flew ground support and proceeded to knock out German armor east of the Salm River.

McKeage was told by the company commander to go forward and establish contact with D Company positioned in Trois Ponts, located about one mile west on high ground.

McKeage arrived on the outskirts of the village just in time to observe fighter-bombers strafing and bombing German positions on the outskirts of the town. One fighter came in low dropping his 500 lb bomb early; the “friendly fire” killed five Americans and wounded many.
The bomb came so close to McKeage that the concussion knocked him to the ground, “temporarily knocking me silly.” After shaking off it off, he headed back to F Company. The company commander, Lieutenant Case, asked if he had been able to contact D Company, McKeage said no and proceeded to tell him to “go jump in the lake, you almost got me killed!” There was no more discussion on the subject. Later McKeage learned from the medics that he had lost about 50 percent of his hearing.

F Company was pulled off the line in time to prepare for a coordinated attack by the regiment on New Year’s Day.

**January 3rd - Another Bad Day**

The day dawned proving to be another bad one. “We kicked off at early daylight and with the attack just underway the main part of the company of three platoons ahead of us disappeared into the woods. Lieutenant Case, the company commander, followed close behind with battalion headquarters and the machine gun section for a total of 19 men. “We started up a fence row, figuring we were behind one of our platoons but as we entered the woods all hell broke loose. Two mortar shells hit with tree bursts right on top of the squad. Sixteen of our men including the complete machine gun section went down, all wounded. Three of us were ok — Lieutenant Case, James Shuman and myself. I had a rifle shot out of my hand.” For some reason, one of the platoons was not ahead of them as they had thought but McKeage said they recovered and moved on.

Later that day, accompanied by tanks, they reached a stopping point at the edge of the woods just off the highway. “A division artillery lieutenant and a sergeant set up a radio in our midst and had just started to call for artillery support when the Krauts zeroed in on us. The first incoming round hit the radio, killing the lieutenant and the sergeant. The next 30 minutes were pandemonium.” McKeage and the others hadn’t had time to dig in and he
said the tree bursts were terrible. “Lost a couple of killed in action and wounded.” While slit trenches provided protection, unless covered over, there is no protection against tree bursts directly overhead. After getting the wounded cared for, McKeage finally got a slit trench dug. It had been a very bad day for F Company.

“Our midnight, Lieutenant Case came along and said, ‘Can I share your trench?’ He sat down with me in his lap and Shuman in his. We were about 40 feet from an open field that was to be the battle zone for the next morning. We had just got to sleep when Case had a nightmare. He got me by the neck and just about threw me out of the trench.” In the meantime McKeage was certain that it was the Krauts who grabbed him. Finally they settled down. “A little while later a German armored car drove up on the road near our tank, observed for a minute or two and then silently backed off.”

January 4th - The Fighting Continues

Up at first light, F Company men struggling out of their foxholes were told to get ready for the attack. At 0800 hrs they started out of the woods in a line abreast, firing as they walked. “When we reached the German defense line along the wooded fence row, many Krauts stood up with their hands in the air.” McKeage said that as the battle progressed, one of the sergeants climbed up on a tank destroyer and manning a fifty caliber, sprayed the German lines. A German took aim killing the sergeant.

“As we moved on, there was a curve in the road to the right. Our tank destroyer that manned a 90-mm gun continued down the road about 400 yards and turned on a road to the left with myself and the company commander following close behind. This placed us with our backs to the road on our right with Lieutenant Case and myself walking behind the tank. Just as we came to a stopping point, a German tank to our rear fired a 88mm, narrowly missing the tank’s turret. Without hesitation our tank
swung its turret around, taking direct aim. This placed us directly beneath the muzzle of the 90 mm tank destroyer.” McKeage, sensing what was about to happen, immediately knocked Case down. They both lay flat on the ground. “The tank fired. The noise and tremendous concussion hit us hard. I think we both bounced off the ground about three feet plus, more hearing gone.” The tank destroyer managed to hit the German tank, knocking it out of commission.

McKeage and Lieutenant Case, deciding that again it was not their day, were sure the Germans had their number. “We kept moving and finally came to the top of the hill where we could see the town of Arbrefontaine around a big curve in the road to our right front.” McKeage reported that as they came around the curve, a German tank zeroed in on their tank destroyer, knocking it out.

A few minutes later Lt Col Vandervoort, the battalion commander, came up the road. He told Case, “Your F Company is doing a good job; now get out front on that road and lead them into town.” Case turned to McKeage, “Come on Don, I don’t give a ___ if I do get hit.” So McKeage and Lieutenant Case walked down the road into the edge of Arberfontaine. On their way into town, a shell came in on their right flank, killing Howard Krueger. He had written a poem in a foxhole about death in Normandy while on Hill “191.”

**Death and I**

*By Corporal Howard R. Krueger*

Gaunt, stark, naked death,
What an ugly loathsomeness thou do possess
You creeping crawling cancerous thing
In every worldly place is found your sting.

Spare me not; I’m not afraid,
You’ll find me easily – all arrayed
In splendid attire to attend my grave.
DON MCKEAGE

Seek ye some other ripened fruit,
Surprise and wrest them, gather your loot,
Your sickle, your scythe, mower of life
I fear you not; my armor is Christ.

McKeage said that both he and Lieutenant Case leading F Company continued on to the edge of town to the first building, “And to this day, I still wonder why the Krauts let us walk into town. They had us dead, but didn’t pull the trigger.” As they reached the edge of town, McKeage reported that another trooper was killed in action.

January 5th and 6th

McKeage became acting first sergeant and took command of the company when Case was wounded.

The 505th history, Ready, tells the story:

“Daybreak on January 5th heralded another cold and snowy day. It had snowed most of the night, and again the regiment spent a bitter night without overcoats and sleeping bags. The 2nd Battalion seized Abrefontaine without difficulty as the Germans had evacuated it for the most part. The only action came from small rear-guard units and the continual artillery and mortar fire. F Company lost its last officer, Case in this action. When Lieutenant Case was wounded, McKeage, acting first sergeant, took over command until the battalion sent John Phillips up to the company the next day.” (The next day C Company also lost its last officer and a staff sergeant assumed command until an officer was sent in as a replacement).
January 7th – The Regiment Attacks

The 505th jumped off at 0630 hours with the final objective, the Salm River.

The regimental history describes the action. “The 2nd Battalion had the hardest fight of the day. Their objective was a small town of Goronne that was occupied by at least one company of German infantry and backed by four Tiger tanks. The open country around the town offered little cover or concealment, and the battalion suffered considerable casualties as the men worked their way forward. Eventually tank destroyers were able to get into a position on the flank and knock out two of the Tigers. The other two withdrew, but not before knocking out two tanks and two tank destroyers with the battalion. The battalion easily overran the town taking about 100 prisoners.”

The day turned out to be a disaster for the 2nd Battalion, stunned when it was to learn that Colonel Vandervoort was a casualty, hit by mortar fire. The wound ended his Army career. (In spite of his disabling injury, he went on to serve in the CIA and later was found shot to death in his home under rather strange circumstances). “The men in the battalion had come to believe that its long time commander was invincible.”

In his account of the same action, McKeage reported that the company became engaged in a bitter tank battle with the Germans that lasted until midday. “Finally we knocked out two tiger tanks while the other two backed out through Goronne. As McKeage noted, “to fight another day.”

It was then that they learned Lt Col Vandervoort had been severely wounded, losing his eye.

The Regiment Takes a Rest

McKeage said that the regiment was ordered to Theux, Belgium for a much needed rest. Heading up an advance
party, McKeage determined the general areas where the company would be located. After the company arrived and settled down, the new company commander called for McKeage and told him to get his gear together as he and a man from D Company would be leaving for the front to establish an area in preparation for the battalions’ move into the line. They were dropped off in a little town with rations for about three days. “We were near the front and the fighting went on all day and all night. After a couple of days our rations ran out, somebody had forgotten us.”

There were only six farmhouses in the village but McKeage and the trooper from D Company were able to stay in a small room between the house and barn. “Even though the couple had very little food available, there was flour for bread, butter and lots of fresh milk. Every morning and night the lady fixed us warm milk and toast.”

January 24th

As the regiment was preparing to leave Theux on January 25th, a truck arrived to bring back McKeage and the man from D Company to their companies. McKeage didn’t relate any conversations about why they had been temporarily forgotten. Then came the news that the men were moving out again with little or no rations and without a chance to bathe or change to clean, warm clothing. McKeage was unable to clean up as he had been moved from place to place. The rest of the regiment however fared better. The 505th history said that the village of Theux was one of the best places the regiment had ever been located in a combat area. It also noted the Belgian people opened their doors to the regiment. A quartermaster laundry offered a change to clean combat clothes and the local people shared their limited supply of food.

Lieutenant Wm. Hayes was now the F Company commander. He had been their commander previously in Holland.
The comforts of Theux were soon gone however as the regiment moved into heavy snow and bitter cold. By then McKeage had managed to get a pair of buckled arctic shoes.

McKeage reported that the 307th Engineers, braving harassment from the Germans, sent their bulldozers forward to plow the roads for the supporting tanks. “I remember sleeping standing up in the snow.” But they kept moving on through the forest and at one point as they prepared to halt for the night, the regimental commander arrived. He personally urged the men to keep moving. He led the companies forward, marching all night to reach the Siegfried Line, their objective, by morning. The 505th launched its attack on February 2nd.

With a bad case of frost bite and wounded with shrapnel sticking out of his hand, McKeage was evacuated to a general treatment station where he received medical care and was further evacuated to a general hospital in Paris. There, 24 litter cases were loaded and buckled down ready for travel in a C-47 bound for England. The cross channel airlift proved to be something else. “As we crossed the channel a huge storm hit us. We were flying so low the waves were splashing on the wings of the aircraft. We reached the coast and made an emergency landing. We almost lost it, slamming into the runway.”

The war was about over when McKeage was flown west to Bournemouth, England. There he was placed in one of the five big general hospitals that had been set up for D-day. McKeage wrote, “My hearing was gone forever and I was not gaining any of my lost weight.” Placed in rehab, he was moved from the hospital to a gym-type living area. Struggling to recover, he was finally discharged from the hospital on May 10.

The war had ended on May 8, 1945, so he was told to take an extra five days to reach the 505th. McKeage said he had a great time celebrating in Bournemouth. Joining
others returning to their units, McKeage had another rough channel crossing to France on a LCR (Landing Craft Railroad). Loaded aboard a 40&8 boxcar, he traveled east, crossing the Rhine River at Koln. At one point near the end of his journey, a train going the other way had slowed down in the railroad yards. To his surprise he saw some of the men in his company in another 40&8. “I hollered, ‘F Company’, but they were gone.”

Reaching Verviers, Belgium and after many replacement depots, McKeage finally got back to the 505th where he was loaded on a truck with other 82nd personnel, finally arriving in Epinal, France on June 25, 1945. He said, “By now the old timers had just left to join the 507th and were homeward bound.”

In July the regiment headed for Berlin where they fielded football teams, playing intramural games in the huge Olympic Stadium. The Berlin Wall came much later in the early 60’s.

“From Berlin we went to Camp Oklahoma City, France for processing, then over to England to await the arrival of the Queen Mary for the trip home. We loaded the ship on Dec. 25, 1945 with the battalion in midship. All in all, there were 15,000 men aboard. Dec. 27th we left England for a very rough ride in the North Atlantic.”

McKeage made the Victory Parade down Fifth Avenue on Jan. 12th, 1946. Discharged on Jan 17, he arrived home two days later.

Currently serving as Editor of the 505th Parachute RCT Association’s newsletter, the Panther, he provides news of individual troopers, unit activities and annual reunions.

“At one time we had nearly 1100 names on our roster. Today our numbers are rapidly dwindling. Time is no longer on our side and in a few years we will fade away. It has been a great challenge.”
Lieutenant King Stone
Regimental Headquarters’ Company

A Man For All Reasons

“Strangeness is the great constant in remembered wars. The young man who goes to war enters a strange world governed by strange rules, where everything that is not required is forbidden, a violent and dangerous world where, out there in the darkness or just over the hill, strangers wait whose job it is to kill you.

“Strangest of all is the presence of death and the ways it is present. Mostly young men — certainly most young men in our century — reach adulthood without ever having confronted death face to face. Then they go to war, where death is the whole point, the truest truth, the realist reality; and they find death, when you see it up close, isn’t what you expected, that it’s uglier, more grotesque, less human.”

From “The Soldiers’ Tale” by Samuel Hynes

I remember Lieutenant King Stone well, assigned to our regimental headquarters company in England shortly before the Holland campaign. He was a fairly big man, somewhat asthmatic and older than most of the troopers in the regiment. Very likable, obviously unfit for any combat command due to physical reasons, somehow Stone had slipped through the airborne standards, probably because of the need for officer replacements.

Standing before Col Ekman, desperate to remain in the regiment, Stone pleaded, “I am willing to do whatever task is assigned to me, if I can just participate in the next combat jump.” Col. Ekman didn’t have the heart to turn him down. Searching in his mind, the regimental commander thought of an unpleasant task but a necessary one that Lieutenant Stone might be willing and able to do.
He asked Stone if he would be the Regimental Graves Registration Officer.

Col Ekman explained further that no one, from the lowliest private to the highest general really expects to be killed in a war, but conceding this unlikely event, every soldier has a dread that his body will lie rotting, stinking and unforgotten in some ditch with his whereabouts unknown to his family. Col Ekman went on to explain that it is also bad for morale when the bodies of friends and buddies are left lying on the battlefield for hours and days, and good for morale to see them collected promptly and solicitously taken care of.

Without hesitation Lieutenant Stone said yes although he probably didn’t realize what the task of Graves Registration Officer really meant. He would soon find out.

Ready, the regimental history said, “After jumping with the regiment in the Holland drop, he (Lieutenant Stone) acquired an old, beat-up German truck. Thereafter day or night, and many times under fire himself, he made his rounds, collected the bodies of men where they fell and carried them to the temporary cemetery at Muleshoe, Holland where they were given a reverential burial. A call to regiment at any hour would bring Stone to the position within a matter of an hour or so at most. His efforts did much to sustain the regiment’s morale during the dark days it spent in Holland.”

I remember seeing and talking to Stone many times when he returned to regimental headquarters after collecting the dead from the battlefield. For my part I expressed thankfulness for what he was doing, once asking him if it ever bothered him. Stone motioned me over to his old beat-up truck and asked me to look under the front seat. There sat a case of good champagne. I gathered it would be appreciated if I didn’t discuss it with anyone so I shook his hand and wished him well. This is the first time I have written about it.
A MATTER OF PRIDE

As the history Ready said, “And last but not least is the part played by an unsung hero, Lieutenant King Stone, whom most 505ers knew neither by name or sight, but whose actions were noted by most of them at one time or another during the campaign.”

After the war I lost track of Stone but was later told that he died in 1964, still a relatively young man.
Leslie Cruise
H Company

“We hardly got to know who they were,” remembers Leslie Cruise after losses of new replacements in a fierce battle in the snow and freezing cold. The battle had taken place in Fosse, Belgium in January 1945 during the Bulge.

He wrote me that the battle proved to be one of the worst of times for H Company. Wounded during the battle, Cruise was bandaged by a trooper who had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in Normandy. The same man was killed in action later that day. The wound kept Cruise in a hospital in France until he was moved to England. He was halfway across the Atlantic when the war ended.

Along with many others wanting to fly in the summer of 1942, Cruise tried to enlist at the age of 18 in the Army Air Corps. Color blind, he was told “no dice.” The Navy and Marines also rejected him on the same day and for the same reason, further adding to his frustrations. Waiting somewhat dejectedly, his draft notice finally arrived in January 1943.

Drafted, he again tried to volunteer for airborne training. “The questioner told me that I was too young — also my mother would have to sign for me. He noted that I scored too high for that type of service. He apparently had a low esteem for the airborne units.” Cruise, too green to protest further, was sent to Tennessee for training in the Coast Artillery. “Ironic that after basic training and communication school I was able to volunteer to become a paratrooper in July 1943 when a notice appeared on the battery bulletin board. I had turned 19 at the end of May 1943.” Accepted, he was told to redo basic training at Fort Benning. Transferred to the 541st Parachute Infantry
Regiment for jump school, Cruise qualified the second week of October.

The regiment was sent to Camp McCall, North Carolina in early November 1943 for further training and maneuvers. He managed a furlough for Thanksgiving, and then on February 11th, 1944 he boarded a troop ship in New York harbor, sailing for Northern Ireland.

Joining the 505th in Quorn, England, Cruise was temporarily housed with Billy Hall’s squad in B Company. Several days later he was assigned to H Company commanded by Captain Walter DeLong. First sergeant. Floyd Taylor sent him to the first platoon. Being a new boy on the block, he received the normal razing reserved for newcomers to include some from the instructors in jump school who enjoyed making statements of possible doom. Eventually he became acquainted and was accepted in the company. He settled down and was “more than happy to be among veterans. I had respect for their knowledge in combat and felt that they would really help me if I needed aid when it counted.”

The English countryside was soon dotted with parachutes as the regiment made practice jumps in preparation for the invasion yet to come.

The regiment was lodged in five-man pyramidal tents with the standard fold-up wooden Army cots. On cold days and nights Cruise remembers, “The pot belly stove in the center of the tent burning hot coke, produced a particularly permeating odor throughout the area. Toilets were located at the end of company street. Payday crap games were continuous until all had lost their dough.” Cruise helped with rations that arrived in a duffel bag with a lock. “Standing retreat in formation on the company street among all those veterans. One tough bunch — an experience hard to forget!”
Shortly after the D-day invasion a six-man patrol composed of three men each from H and G Co and led by a Lieutenant from G Co (names not recalled) were sent into the hedgerow areas in No Mans Land to find and direct stragglers to Ste. Mere Eglise. In the process, the patrol came upon a stream with a fairly swift current, too wide to jump. With a tree limb across it, “the patrol leader took one long step over to the other side, showing us how it was done.” Duck soup, Cruise thought, as his turn came. A slippery wooden pole step sent him reeling. “A dirty rifle, wet ammo, soaked uniform and wounded pride - but the others had their first laugh since early am June 6, 1944.”

Several hours later the patrol reached regimental headquarters, reporting to Generals Ridgeway and Gavin under a camouflage parachute. “We were ordered to rest there and report back to our respective companies early in the morning. I cleaned my rifle for the second time that day to be certain that it was in the proper condition for use. It wasn’t my last patrol, but it was the most humorous one.”

Cruise remembers the best time was on a cold chilly day after the war watching the division and regiment parade up 5th Ave. in New York City on January 12, 1946. “I was warm with pride as they swung up the avenue in cadence with my commander leading them. How I would have loved to be in that sharp looking line of march! They were speaking for all of us who had been part of that division and all who served in WW II.”

After the war, Cruise, bothered by some of his wartime experiences, found publishing a newsletter helpful in dealing with some of those memories. Especially troubled by Normandy, he remembers “particularly on June 7, 1944 when his tent mate Richard Vargas was killed beside me. We were in position at a roadblock on the road to Chef du Pont and several men of the first platoon such as Glen Carpenter, Sergeant Edward White, Alan Beckwith, and Arthur Delano had all been killed.”
“Larry Kilroy, Richard Vargas and myself were ordered to relocate our positions to fill in gaps along the line, but on our way to the new position we got caught in a barrage of shells. Vargas and I managed to cross the road and hit the ground at an opening in the hedgerow, landing side by side. A shell struck the ground right next to Vargas, shattering his right leg from top to bottom. I sent Milroy for a medic while trying to put Vargas’s leg back together. We left him with the medic and went to our new position only to learn that he had died.

“I always thank God for my physical salvation and hope to see Vargas in the heavenly kingdom. I often regret not being a medical person. I know that many in the regiment hold similar experiences. We live with these memories but put them in the proper place as life moves on.”

Considering himself a survivor, Cruise jumped with the regiment in Normandy and Holland, making it through the Bulge.
Cecil Prine
B Company

Cecil Prine participated in all of the 505th campaigns making four combat jumps. Wounded on his 22nd birthday in Holland and evacuated by jeep under enemy fire from Nijmegen to friendly lines, he couldn’t help but compare his ease of evacuation with the apparent inability of the British to keep the same road open.

Prine, 19 years old, served with the 31st Dixie Division at Camp Bowie, Texas. Earlier in 1942, to reduce the impact of possible personnel casualties, the 31st had exchanged bases and personnel from the same town with the 36th Texas Division.

When the transfer of officers and men began, Prine, deciding it was time to look around for a new home, volunteered and was accepted for Parachute School.

“Since I was the very first to apply and leave the division voluntarily, it incensed the division commander so much that he directed my orders to read, “No travel pay authorized.”

Prine left Camp Bowie on a Friday morning in the middle of the month with $5 in cash. After checking his duffel bags at the railroad station, Prine began his amazing odyssey traveling from Texas to Ft Benning, Ga. at no cost to the government. To help him start on his way, first cook Melvin Burnett made sandwiches and J.T. Bowles drove him to town.

On the following Sunday morning in Orange City, Texas, an elderly man, discovering that Prine was traveling at his own expense, handed him $10. Later in Lafayette, La, “A lady seeing me standing on the sidewalk waiting for a ride

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called me into her home; fed me, let me take a bath, washing and ironing my uniform.”

When Prime arrived at Fort Benning, the company clerk was astounded that Prine had had to pay his own way. A request by the School Commandant to the 31st division commanding general to amend the orders and authorizing travel pay was denied.

Completing jump school, Prine was assigned to B Company, 505th in the panhandle area, adjacent to Ft Benning.

Those who made a lasting impression on Prine were Lt Col James M. Gavin, regimental commander; Major Gorham, the battalion commander; 1st Lieutenant Ed Sayre, the executive officer; and 1st Lieutenant Irwin, the 1st platoon leader. Others who impressed him were platoon sergeants Staff Sergeant Michaels and Sergeant Harvill W. Lazenby. The latter lost his leg and is remembered by Prine as the most outstanding individual. Others were Corporal Bill Henderson the assistant squad leader, first class Julius Wyngaert, a machine gunner and Mike Vuletich, the radio operator.

As far as he knew, Prine manned the only machine gun during the battle for the bridge at La Fiere, Normandy. It was “a very bad time, my buddy and I used ten canisters of 30 cal. ammunition on the 6th and 7th of June, in a battle which, had we lost, could easily have changed the outcome of the invasion.”

With B Company scattered over a large area in Sicily, Prine tells of an amusing incident. “Two American jeeps with 50 cal machine guns mounted, came racing towards us from the beach firing at everything that moved, including us. Sergeant Lazenby told me to put a white flag on my rifle and wave it. When they stopped firing I stood up and told them we were friendly.
“Their leader said, ‘Who in the h--- are you people?’ I replied ‘82nd Airborne.’ He said, ‘You have captured our objective.’ So we started our long walk back to Gela, some 70 miles away.”

Prine remembers Italy as the worst of times when the 1st platoon, B Company. was ordered to Altavilla to assist Col Reuben Tucker and the 504th. “Our platoon spent three days there with only the food and water that we carried.” Prine did say that Col Tucker and the 504th were “very special people.”

Prine thought that the single most heroic action in Europe occurred in Holland when G Company, 504th made the crossing of the Waal River in an area near the Nijmegen Bridge. The daylight crossing in canvas-covered boats, made with little or no artillery support saved the bridge and was later featured in the movie, A Bridge Too Far. The 504th suffered an estimated 200 casualties.

“My feelings about the 82nd were the same as those of the British Lt. Gen. at Nijmegen when he told Gen. Gavin that he was proud to shake the hand of the man who commanded the ‘greatest division in the world.’”
The Chicken

In November 1944, H Company, 3rd Battalion, 505th, had made its combat jump in Holland on 17 September. Maintaining a static position along the dikes near Nijmegen, the regiment faced fairly well emplaced German positions.

Pat Reid, a member of H Company, wrote that the unit was dug in behind a high dike across the field, a few hundred feet wide, near the brick kilns. The Germans also were dug in behind another high dike and there was not much action. “Occasionally a machine gun burst from one side or the other, just to let each other know they were there.”

Reid, well known and appreciated for his ability to scrounge food to augment rations wrote, “It was there that I learned that we in company headquarters platoon weren’t the only ones to scrounge for food. It seems a chicken wandered into the area where H Company was dug in. One of the troopers, seeing this chicken, jumped out of his foxhole and tried to catch it. Up and over the dike the chicken went, up and over the trooper went. Out across “no man’s land” went the chicken, with the trooper close behind. The chicken, getting somewhat winded, slowed down a little. With a flying tackle, the trooper grabbed the chicken by the leg.”

“Rising and standing up on top of the dike, H Company applauded and cheered. Across the field and standing on top of their dike were the Germans, doing the same thing.”
The 3rd Battalion commanding officer, “Cannon Ball” Krause came charging up the road several days after the Normandy invasion and stopped by a file of men on either side of the road. Going up to the company commander, Lieutenant Travis Orman, he ordered, ”Show me on your map where we are?” The lieutenant pointed vaguely at the map and finally admitted he didn’t know their location. “Cannon Ball” cursed him and then asked the question again, “Doesn’t anyone know where we are?” Lieutenant Jack Isaacs stepped up with map in hand and said in a quiet voice, “We are here.” “Cannon Ball” dismissed the lieutenant and told Isaacs, “You are now the company commander.”

Drawn by the winds of war, Jack Isaacs enlisted in the Army at the age of 17, joining the 17th Infantry Division under the command of “Vinegar Joe” Stillwell. Isaacs said that he preferred regular-army types with their standards of training, so he and others were transferred to the 3rd Division, 15th Infantry Regiment at Ft Lewis, Washington.

On Pearl Harbor day, Isaacs went back to California for maneuvers and much to his dismay, drew strike duty at the North American Aviation Plant in El Segundo, Ca.

Returning to Ft Lewis, Issacs jumped at the opportunity to go to the Officer Candidate School at Ft Benning,
Georgia. Accepted, he successfully completed the course, graduating on July 19, 1942. Drawn by the extra hazard pay and the challenge of the airborne, he volunteered, completing his airborne training and assigned to G Company. Isaacs said, “I’m sure that the motivation for jump school was the money.”

“While we were on the Alabama side of the river, Joe Gibbons was the company commander and later we had Francis Meyers. Bob Piper was a member of the company, also a Lieutenant Sayer and a man named (Richard) Wells who was invalided home from Africa.”

**Sicily and North Africa**

Making the combat jump in Sicily, approximately 65 men from G Company assembled with their company commander, Captain James McGinity and Isaacs as executive officer. Realizing that they had been misdropped, McGinity ordered them to dig in on a hill that overlooked Biazza Ridge about a mile to the southwest. McGinity, hearing sounds of battle coming from Biazza Ridge, assumed that it was from elements of the 180th Infantry. He was reluctant to give up the high ground so the men from G Company missed the battle for Biazza Ridge. However their presence in that location may have deterred the German commander from making a flank attack on the north side of Biazza Ridge. Their contribution to that battle may have been greater than they realized.

During the first days of the Sicilian campaign Capt. McGinity was moved to the 1st Battalion because of the casualties there and Jim Maness assumed command of G Company. Isaacs noted, “Jim had made me company executive, although I was not the senior 1st Lieutenant, however he kept me in that capacity through Sicily, Italy and Ireland.”
D-Day, Normandy

Jack Isaacs writes, “Just before D-day, Maness was sent to the 2nd Battalion as executive officer and Bill Follmer took over command of G Company. Colonel Ben Vandervoort and Maness did not get along at all and Maness was returned to the 3rd Battalion. I asked to be returned to the 3rd platoon for Normandy. That request was granted but it didn’t make much difference because in ten days I was company commander. Bill Follmer broke his hip on the drop.”

On the D-day drop, at least three sticks of paratroopers from the 3rd Battalion dropped within sight of Montebourg, six miles north of Ste. Mere Eglise. Isaacs and the battalion S2 (intelligence) managed to assemble 33 men, however in subsequent skirmishes with the enemy, all were captured except Isaacs.

In the attack, G Company and I Company reached the railroad on the east side of St Sauveur le Vicomte without difficulty but there they ran into a strong enemy force dug in along the embankment. I Company was able to cross the railroad but heavy machine gun and tank fire held up G Company. Isaacs, now the company commander, solved the problem by positioning the company behind I Company and then hitting the German position on the flank, causing them to withdraw. With Lieutenant Mastrangelo wounded, Issacs said, “Ivan Wood was next, blinded in one eye when he and I were hit by the same shell. Next was Travis Orman who was killed June 16. He had been relieved because he and Colonel Krause didn’t get along. I took over when Orman was relieved.”

That left Isaacs without any officers, but as he noted, "My non-commissioned officers were quite equal to the task and we continued the attack.”

During the night, all three companies got into the midst of a large German force with an all night fight. Issacs and
his radio operator were on one side of a hedgerow with Germans on the other and Col Krause on the radio hollering, “Move on, there is nothing in front of you.” They solved the two problems by turning off the radio. First, the noise wouldn’t give them away and second, they wouldn’t have to listen to Krause saying that there were no Krauts around.

**Holland**

For the drop into Holland, the noise of the armada of aircraft was so great that it was reported that the telephones were difficult to use. People by the hundreds in England could be seen in the streets waving.

The regiment landing on the drop zones on the soft sandy soil was described as the easiest ever made. G and H Companies, still commanded by Captain Isaacs and Maness, respectively, quickly overran Groesbeek with the help of the 2nd Battalion coming in from the northeast side.

After liberating Groesbeek during which two battalions bagged about 100 prisoners, the 3rd Battalion moved out to the perimeter assigned to it with a front covering nearly two miles. Well before dark the battalion had the major roads blocked and its strong points positioned.

**Battle of the Bulge**

In the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium, along the Salm River G Company had thrown a bridgehead across the river. After arriving at Petit Halleux the bridge was found intact so Issacs sent Lt George Clark’s platoon across the river where they set up a strong defense in the town and an outpost 300 yards to the front — up on a small hill. The balance of the company was placed on the other or west side of the river for supporting fire. Isaacs also had a squad of 307th Engineers and two 90 MM guns from the 703rd Tank Destroyer Battery.
On January 22nd, an estimated battalion of German infantry and tanks suddenly hit the outpost and overwhelmed it with every man killed. Sergeant Willie Beaty, before he died, did manage to warn the company on the field phone. The Germans then hit Lieutenant Clark’s platoon and as Issacs said, “This was the only time during the war that I saw Germans make a direct, frontal assault in the open charging down off the hill, screaming and shouting as they came.” Clark’s platoon fought hard, but was overwhelmed. Isaacs ordered them back across the river. The bridge was blown and as the Germans forded the river they were cut down. Not one reached the other side. In addition to his own mortars, Isaacs was able to get the support of division artillery that knocked out one half-track vehicle and probably two tanks.

On February 2nd, the 1st and 3rd Battalions attacked southwest with tank support toward the Seigfried Line in the vicinity of Losheimergraben, with G Company making the first contact. In the late afternoon the company came to a clearing overlooking a valley with a stream running through it. As they began getting small arms fire, Isaacs organized an attack and crossed the valley, losing one man. Crossing the creek they were surprised to find themselves in an area of giant well-concealed pillboxes. They attacked these and by nightfall had reduced six of them and taken about 60 prisoners. They lost several men killed and wounded while doing so.

After making the Elbe crossing with the war ended, Isaacs offered some fascinating comments about POWS who had been captured. “We had 1000 German POWs and about 600 Russians in German uniform and also a squadron of horse-mounted Hungarian cavalry. The Russians didn’t exercise field discipline and we had a terrible outbreak of dysentery. On my own, I rearmed the Hungarians and in no time we had the Russians under control. I feel that it was a ‘Cossack’ compleat.” Sources: 2, 5, and 26

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I remember Jack Isaacs as “Mr. G Company.”

Quiet – not given to a lot of words, Isaacs was a good leader who made sound decisions on the battlefield. Somewhat pragmatic in nature, he concerned himself mainly with practical consequences.

His men said they “would follow him anywhere in combat” — and that probably best describes their respect and loyalty. Participating in four combat jumps, he was wounded in Normandy and awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action with a Purple Heart. A second Silver Star and Purple Heart as well as a Bronze Star were awarded in later campaigns.

Bill Bishop recalls his first impressions of the G Company officers. “They were all young, but good officers who cared for their men.” He especially remembers Jack Isaacs. “He and Jim Maness impressed me as the best officers that I have ever served under.”

Jack served in G Company while I was assigned as the communication officer for the 3rd Battalion.

After the war I often invited Isaacs to attend dinners that I put together for regimental headquarters company held during the regimental reunions.
The 40 & 8 boxcar used by elements of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment during its various campaigns, is well remembered for its mode of transport. While uncomfortable, the memories were never harsh ones.

History Of The 40 & 8

American Legionnaires, veterans of congressionally recognized wartime periods via their Legion membership, formed the Forty & Eight organization in 1920.

The Forty & Eight’s title and symbols reflect its First World War origins. American servicemen in France were transported to the battlefront on narrow gauge French railroads (chemin de fer) inside boxcars (voitures) that were half the size of American boxcars. Each French boxcar was stenciled with a “40/8”, denoting its capacity to hold either forty men or eight horses. This ignominious and uncomfortable mode of transportation was familiar to all who traveled from the coast to the trenches; a common small misery among American soldiers who thereafter found “40/8” a lighthearted symbol of the deeper service, sacrifice and unspoken horrors of war that truly bind those who have borne the battle.

Source: 31
“As a medic in combat, there is terrible tension always. You eat, sleep, drink, and fight with these men. You hear about their conquests and defeats, their loves and hates. As a rifleman or machine gunner, when you see one fall, you feel the pain, but you look away. When you are a medic, you die a little each time with them.”

John R. Lyons - 505th Medic from *Rendezvous At Rochelinval* by Bill Tucker

Daniel B. McIlvoy, Jr
505th Regimental Surgeon

Doctor McIlvoy writes, “Writers like to write about wars, mostly about generals and other officers and the fighting enlisted men. There was little about the medic aid men and their contribution. Our medics had a warm, respected place with the men they served. They were affectionately called “Doc,” watched over, fought for in the pubs and protected as much as they could be in combat ... In our regiment when the combat soldiers were awarded combat infantry badges or pay, it was noted that the medics did not receive these badges or pay, since they were not gun-carrying combatants. The enlisted men of the regiment volunteered to give money out of their own pockets for a so-called combat medic pay, which the medics turned down.

“...One of the bravest officers I’ve ever known or heard of, was Dr. Pete Suer, a Jewish dentist who could speak some German. He would plaster a jeep with red cross flags
505th Surgeons and Medics

and carry German wounded to the front lines and swap them for our American boys who were also wounded.”

McIlvoy wrote that Suer later lost both legs due to a mortar shell and was eventually evacuated to Walter Reed Hospital. He died while undergoing surgery to enable him to use artificial limbs.

About Our 505th Doctors and Medics

Colonel Dan McIlvoy, our regimental surgeon, provided me with a truly fascinating account of doctors and medics in the 505 during WW II. He credits the 505th medical organization with contributing to a lower casualty rate. Applying lessons learned during successive campaigns made this possible.

As battalion surgeon and later regimental surgeon, Dan McIlvoy instituted new methods of evacuating casualties. The Army Medical Corps adopted many of his suggestions for improving care of the wounded and their evacuation.

After reading Doctor McIlvoy’s account of the bravery and sacrifices of medics and doctors, I remembered witnessing just such displays of courage and total disregard for safety by McIlvoy, private first class Murray Goldman and private first class Marvin L. Crosby (medical detachment) during the Sicilian campaign at Biazza Ridge.

The following account is from a letter written by Goldman:

“July 11, 1943, I was told to move up to the vicinity of Biazza Ridge with part of the battalion aid personnel to an area where part of our battalion was engaged.

“Major McIlvoy and several others had gone ahead to establish the aid station. When I arrived at the place, I found the entire area under intense mortar, small arms and high velocity artillery fire. However, the aid station was functioning and about twenty to thirty wounded were
collected and being treated in a defiladed area in an olive orchard.

“Major McIlvoy was present and had procured an Italian truck, which was marked with the Geneva Red Cross.

“About this time, a runner appeared and excitedly reported that there were very many wounded up ahead, and exposed to enemy fire. The Major never hesitated; he jumped into the driver’s seat of the vehicle and asked for two volunteers to accompany him, as he knew that the mission was extremely hazardous. Crosby and myself were the first aboard and we were off.

“We drove into the fire-swept area searching the fields on both sides of the road for our wounded. Making a turn in the road, we came face to face with a German Mark VI tank.

“The Major drove the truck off the road and into the ditch and attempted to turn it around. We were immediately machine-gunned by fire from the tank and several other positions on our flank. The concrete road marker that I was lying behind received a direct hit and concussion stunned me. I looked up and saw the Major and cried out that I had been hit. The Major started towards me and was himself hit in the back by a mortar fragment. Nevertheless, he helped me to my feet and we both started back. We had proceeded about twenty yards when the truck we had used was blown to bits by a direct hit by cannon fire from the tank.

“The Major helped me back to the aid station and continued throughout the day and far into the night to supervise the collection, treatment and evacuation of every man wounded in that entire area. When this job was done, he also supervised and started an evacuation in the city of Vittoria. We had no transportation, our medical supplies were only what we brought in by air and carried for the most part on our persons; yet no wounded man
failed to be evacuated to the rear within a short time after being wounded.

“Major McIlvoy’s sincerity, courage and devotion to this task were the inspiration with which we accomplished a task that even now seems almost impossible.”

**Doctor Robert Franco**
**Regimental Surgeon**

Reticent about his medals, Doctor Bob Franco was one of our fine and respected 505th surgeons during WW II.

A Seattle native, Franco graduated from the University of Oregon Medical School prior to WW II. He subsequently completed jump school, receiving his wings in February 1943. He served with the 505th from Sicily to Germany.

Franco was awarded the Silver Star, Soldier’s Medal and Purple Heart with Cluster.

I had written Franco congratulating him on an award he received during a 505th reunion. I asked if he would mind providing information as to how it came about. Here is his response:

“Thank you for your card. Two conflicting feelings emerged. I was, as always, happy to hear from you and thus know you are OK. I was not happy about the request for information about the medals. I really feel I did nothing special and I feel more strongly that any kind of publicity about me is unwarranted and unwanted.

“Because you are my friend I will respond as requested. The Silver Star event took place three weeks after Normandy D-Day. We were in the first non-action situation I can remember and were holding some kind of position facing south. Word came about a couple of wounded men. Out of sheer boredom I said to the men, ‘You guys rest; I’ll go.’ We got into a jeep, stupidly stopped it at a crossroads in the woods, and set out on foot. Artillery shelling, probably
75’s, arrived just as we entered thick woods. Tree-bursts made lying on the ground useless, at least for me. A few fragments hit me. One was near enough to a major artery to make me lie still and elect to be carried back to the jeep. I survived two surgeries and offers from every medical officer I encountered for evacuation home. Instead I made the August practice jump with my bottom swathed in thick dressings.

“Recently, reading one of Paul Fussel’s books dealing with the war, I thought of how a rather ordinary act can be dressed up to appear great. He was an infantry platoon leader and received similar wounds. An experienced writer and head of the English department at Penn, he knows something about descriptive writing and how it can be used to dress up ordinary facts.

“The Soldier’s Medal came in that same time frame. Our battalion was in reserve, at least for a few hours and a group of us, perhaps a hundred or so, was sitting around in the ditches with hedgerows. Somehow a 6x6 truck drove into the formation, stopped, and immediately became the center of a bunch of explosions. It was an ammunition truck bringing in supplies and it exploded in many small bursts. Everyone hugged the ground by the hedgerows. I suddenly noticed a soldier on the truck; he was crying and trying blindly to find his way out. I ran to the truck and got there as an aid-man arrived from the opposite direction. We pulled the hurt soldier off the truck and dragged him to safety. I don’t know if he survived; I heard later he died, but could not verify this.

“The Cluster to the Purple Heart was even odder. During a firefight we were busy in the aid station when one of the men said, “What’s this?” He saw a hole in my right sleeve and a hole in the skin beneath. He reached in with a finger and flipped out a piece of bent metal about the size of a dime. When I growled at him about getting back to work, he said he would do so after he wrote up my wound on one
The Combat Medic In World War II

Because the quality of medical care for casualties played such a critical role in the lives of troopers in the 505th during World War II, a brief summary of drugs used on the battlefield to help save lives has been included. The following history is taken from medical references with photos and partial text extracted from American Military Medical Impressions obtained online.

It wasn’t any different to be killed in World War II than it was during the Civil War or World War I. However, if the World War II GI was wounded by a bullet, shrapnel or stricken by a disease such as malaria, his chances for survival were much greater than his ancestor. During the Civil War, 50 percent or more of the men admitted to hospitals died. During World War I it was eight percent, in World War II, four percent.

During World War II drugs such as sulfa (Sulfanilamide) and penicillin were discovered and advanced surgical techniques were introduced to make these improvements possible, but the first reason for such successes in improving the mortality rate was the speed with which wounded men were treated. It began with the frontline combat medics. In the beginning of the war at training camps, medics had been mildly despised because many of them were conscientious objectors and often ridiculed. Sometimes called “pill pushers” or worse. But in combat they were loved, respected and admired. Medic Buddy Gianelloni recalls, “Overseas it becomes different. They called you medic and before you knew it, it was Doc. I was 19 at the time.”

The main objective of the medic was to get the wounded away from the front lines. Many times this involved the medic climbing out from the protection of his foxhole dur-
ing shelling or into no-man’s-land to help a fallen comrade. Once with the wounded soldier, the medic would do a brief examination, evaluate the wound, apply a tourniquet if necessary, sometimes inject a vial of morphine, clean up the wound as best he could and sprinkle sulfa powder on the wound followed by a bandage. Then he would drag or carry the patient out of harms way and to the rear. This was many times done under enemy fire or artillery shelling. In most cases, the Germans respected the Red Cross armband.

**Atabrine**

For hundreds of years quinine was used in the prevention and treatment of malaria. Quinine is found in the root, bark, and branches of cinchonas and other trees native to the Andes Mountains in South America. In 1820, a new method was developed to isolate quinine and cinchonine, another drug from the cinchona tree, from cinchona bark. These drugs were then used to combat malaria instead of the bark itself. In the 1930s the first synthetic antimalarial drugs were developed. However, quinine remained in wider use than its synthetic counterparts until World War II, when the supply of quinine from countries in the South Pacific was cut off by Japanese military conquest. Malaria reached epidemic proportions among American troops fighting the Japanese on islands in the South Pacific. Early in the war a campaign to prevent malaria was initiated. A synthetic drug invented by a German researcher before the war was distributed to American troops stationed on the South Pacific islands. This drug was sold under the name of Atabrine. Complaints against the yellow pills became common. Atabrine was bitter, appeared to impart its own sickly hue to the skin. Some of its side effects were headaches, nausea, and vomiting, and in a few cases it
produced a temporary psychosis. Yet Atabrine was effective, if only the men could be made to take it. A great part of the problem was that the proper dosage had not yet been worked out. In an effort to ensure that the Atabrine was actually swallowed by the soldiers, medics or NCOs from the combat units stood at the head of mess lines to carefully watch Marines and soldiers take their little yellow tablets.

**Penicillin**

Recognizing the potential of the Pfizer process for producing penicillin and desperate for massive quantities to aid in the war effort, the U.S. government authorized 19 companies to produce the antibiotic using Pfizer’s deep-tank fermentation techniques, which Pfizer had agreed to share with its competitors. Many of these companies could not come close to Pfizer’s production levels and quality. Ultimately Pfizer produced 90 percent of the penicillin that went ashore with Allied forces at Normandy on D-day in 1944 and more than half of all the penicillin used by the Allies for the rest of the war, helping to save countless lives.

**Sulfanilamide**

Discovery of Sulfanilamide greatly affected the mortality rate during World War II. American soldiers were taught to immediately sprinkle sulfa powder on any open wound to prevent infection. Every soldier was issued a first aid pouch for attachment to the soldier’s waist belt. The first aid pouch contained a package of sulfa powder and a bandage to dress the wound. One of the main
components carried by a combat medic during World War II was sulfa powder and sulfa tablets.

Plasma

Plasma is the liquid portion of the blood — a protein-salt solution in which red and white blood cells and platelets are suspended. Plasma, which is 90 percent water, constitutes 55 percent of blood volume. Plasma contains albumin (the chief protein constituent), fibrinogen (responsible, in part, for the clotting of blood), and globulins (including antibodies). Plasma serves a variety of functions, from maintaining a satisfactory blood pressure and volume to supplying critical proteins for blood clotting and immunity. It also serves as the medium of exchange for vital minerals such as sodium and potassium, thus helping maintain a proper balance in the body, which is critical to cell function. Plasma is obtained by separating the liquid portion of blood from the cells.

In 1938, Dr. Charles Drew, a leading authority on mass transfusion and blood processing methods, set up a blood plasma system. By 1939, Dr. Drew had set up a blood bank at the Columbia Medical Center. He made a breakthrough discovery that blood plasma could replace whole blood, which deteriorated in a few days in storage. This discovery played a major role during World War II where many countries experienced extreme casualties.

Blood was urgently needed for wounded troops as war raged across Europe in 1940. Dr. Drew was chosen by the International Transfusion Association to organize the Blood for Britain project. This program collected, processed and transported 14,500 units of plasma — all within five months. Dr. Drew’s scientific research helped
revolutionize blood plasma transfusion so that pooled plasma could readily be given on the battlefield, which dramatically improved opportunities to save lives.

Fearing the U.S. would be drawn into World War II, the American armed forces requested development of a similar blood collection system. In February of 1941, Dr. Drew was appointed Director of the first American Red Cross Blood Bank. He established an effective plasma collection and preservation organization — a model for today’s volunteer blood donation programs.

Because of its ability to reduce death from shock caused by bleeding, dried plasma became a vital element in the treatment of the wounded on World War II battlefields. By the time the program ended in September 1945, the American Red Cross had collected over 13 million units of blood and converted nearly all of it into plasma. “If I could reach all America,” said General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces, “there is one thing I would like to do — thank them for blood plasma and whole blood. It has been a tremendous thing.” At war’s end, some 1.3 million plasma units were returned to the American Red Cross, which made them available to civilian hospitals.

Morphine, as a painkiller, was widely used during World War II. Morphine is processed from the opium poppy plant, which is grown mainly in Turkey and India. As long ago as AD 100, opium was swallowed or taken with a beverage. In the 17th century, when opium smoking was introduced into China, a serious addiction problem resulted. After the invention of the hypodermic syringe during the American Civil War (1861-1865), morphine injections proved indispensable for patients undergoing
surgery. Injecting morphine into the blood proved more addictive than smoking or eating opium. During World War II, Squibb, a pharmaceutical company, developed a way for medics to administer on the front lines a controlled amount of morphine to wounded soldiers. What Squibb introduced was called a morphine syrette, which was like a miniature toothpaste tube that contained the morphine. Instead of unscrewing a top like you do on a toothpaste tube, it had a blind end that was sealed. The medic used a needle to puncture the seal. The medic would come along, break the seal and inject the wounded soldier with the morphine Syrette.

During World War II, Medics were allowed to administer morphine to alleviate pain, although the injection could also be given at battalion, or collecting stations. If the drug was applied, the Syrette was pinned to the casualty’s collar to prevent overdosing of unconscious patients. Usually the 1/2-grain injection from the toothpaste tube shaped syrette, combined with physical exhaustion, was sufficient to knock the patient out, with the casualty often waking up in the hospital.

(I remember McIlvoy as always up front, expressing his own views, not reluctant to disagree with some of the views of the commanders and staff when he believed that his medical opinion should prevail. Col Gavin, the regimental commander, would always make the final decision.

Franco became a personal friend.
Both became respected civilian doctors after the war.)
Sauerkraut Downs

With the war in Europe at an end, the Army announced a point system so that all “high-pointer” would be sent home and discharged. The lack of available transport however, made it appear that those days would be some time in coming, and in the meantime the regiment settled down to the unfamiliar task of guarding thousands of German prisoners.

The regiment moved indoors, appropriating houses for this purpose in the small villages centered on Vielank, Germany. Regular battalion messes were set up with the boring and time-consuming duties of KP (kitchen police) and laundry taken over by well-screened German prisoners. Other prisoners shined boots, gave haircuts, and shaves. The “no fraternization” order was still in effect, but that had little to do with 505ers as the forested area where it ended the war had few people to fraternize with anyway. Deer hunting became popular, both for sport and out of necessity, as rations were monotonous.

There was a plentiful supply of horses and daily horse races became popular with considerable money changing hands as each company backed its entry to the hilt. With the cry “They’re off”, the first running of horse races at “Sauerkraut Downs” took place with a paddock and two betting windows. No one ever admitted to what kind of nags were running nor from where they might have been “requisitioned.”

“Sauerkraut Downs” was reported to have been managed and operated by a three man staff: Major Walter Delong acting as judge, steward and operator of the pari-mutuels board, Captain Patterson as the official starter, and Lt. Piernick handling the cash. A few more individuals remain unidentified, apparently for good reason.
Finally, after almost a month, the regiment and the division turned over the prisoners to the British on June 2nd, 1945 and boarded “40 and 8s” for the long ride back to France, arriving at “Camp Chicago,” near Lyon, France. Eventually those with high points were exchanged with those with low points in the 17th Airborne Division. The 82nd went on to occupy Berlin with “high – pointers” assigned to the 17th returned to the US.

Source: 2
Not This Time!

During many of the reunions, while collecting material for the *Static Line*, I heard the same incident recalled over the years. It occurred, as I remember, during the Sicilian campaign.

A trooper tending a gravely wounded buddy in a ditch beside a narrow dirt road heard the unmistakable sound of treads from an approaching tank. Looking up to see the direction of the sound, he saw a German tank moving slowly towards them along the dirt road. The wounded trooper told his buddy, “Take off before it’s too late.” His buddy looked at him, “I’m staying.” He had no intention of leaving.

The tank stopped. The turret hatch went up, the German tank commander stood up, looking down at the two in the ditch with the trooper tending his buddy. They briefly exchanged glances.

The German tank commander pulled the hatch down over his head and the tank continued on its way.
Frank Bilich
D Company

With World War II underway, Frank Bilich wanted to be a pilot. He discovered that he could select the Air Corps by enlisting in the Army, so he signed up after graduating from high school in February 1943.

Pleased with himself, Bilich reported to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois, only to be told that he was shipping out — “big secret, to where, nobody knows.” Much to Bilich’s consternation, he soon found himself at Camp Roberts, California (with seemingly the world’s largest parade ground) destined to undergo basic training in the Army. Wasting no time, Bilich received permission to see the company commander. Asking what he was doing in the Infantry, he was told, “That’s where the Army needs you.” Bilich insisted that he had joined the Air Corps. The company commander terminated the discussion with the statement, “You joined the Army and the Air Corps is a branch of the Army.” It all boiled down to the need for infantrymen.

The activation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in July 1942 also created an acute need for paratroopers. As a result, almost the entire output of the classes in parachute school went to the 505th in the summer of 1942.

Accepted for airborne training at Ft Benning, Ga, the trip turned out to be somewhat uncomfortable and lengthy. “I remember we spent the whole day in Marshall, Texas, sitting on a siding in the hot sun. Some of the civilians brought us lemonade, muffins and cookies.”

Bilich was sent to the “Frying Pan,” a training area across the river with tents and Quonset huts. “We spent the whole month of August running.”
Graduating in October 1943, Bilich was shipped out on the Queen Mary, docking on December 20th at Goric, Scotland, five days before Christmas. The Queen Mary was nicknamed the “Gray Ghost” because her paint job blended in with the sea on misty days. From March 1940 through September of 1946 the luxurious ocean liner was transformed into a carrier ship. During this period, she carried a total of 765,429 military personnel and sailed a total of 569,429 miles. Conditions during this period bore little resemblance to those experienced by the Queen Mary’s paying passengers. During the war, she often carried as many as 15,000 troops at one time.

The regiment had arrived in the Bay of Belfast from Oran on December 9 and trucked to Cookstown, Ireland, a small town about 40 miles west of Belfast just past Lake Neagh. The lake was some 12 to 14 miles long and about eight miles wide.

Cookstown is remembered for its main street that is perfectly straight, one and a quarter miles long with a hump in the middle and 130 feet wide. Designed by an 18th century landlord it remained the same over the years. After arrival at Cookston, the regiment had begun to receive replacements with training limited to time mostly spent on physical conditioning and sports. The 505th was lodged in Quonset huts near the village. Cold at night, the days were short, with daylight from nine in the morning until late afternoon.

Bilich wrote, “I wound up in D Company in Cookstown. That was really a break for me.” At the age of 18, he thinks that he was the youngest in the company.

The acting 1st sergeant, nine years older, had been a friend of his who lived in Chicago, Illinois on the same street, four houses apart. He had first served in the CCC, then spent some time in the Army before becoming a paratrooper. Bilich said that knowing him made him feel more relaxed. As the youngest in the company he was
considered the “The Kid.” Existence was also made easier, much to his relief, with the advice and help of two others as well as “Pop” Graig who was considerably older and had been a lumberjack.

Pleased to be assigned to the 505th, Bilich said, “When things went wrong in combat, someone always stepped forward to take charge. The fact that I am a survivor is proof that I never worried in combat when I had a trooper on my right or left. I think this makes paratroopers what they are.”

Bilich remembers men 8-12 years older in the company who represented an interesting mix of people from about every state of the union. “There were the different languages: Polish, Croatian, German, Italian, French, you name it. There was also a lot of camaraderie along with jokes and tricks. During the time in Ireland with a reduced training schedule, the men took the opportunity to relax and enjoy themselves. Sometimes after a night of celebrating, a trooper would wake up in the morning and find himself tied up to his cot or as in one case, tied up in a mattress cover and hung up in the company tree.” All of this came to an end on February 13 when the division was transported across the Irish Sea to a Scottish port where a train took it to Camp Quorn, next to Quorndon, England. Unlike Cookstown, the regiment was housed in the not so comfortable pyramidal tents. Camp Quorn proved to be its base for the invasions of Normandy and Holland.

Bilich said that training for the Normandy invasion was hard, continuous and demanding. He said that one of his buddies seemed to have a premonition of death and asked to go in seaborne for the invasion. However he ended up jumping with his platoon and was killed the first day in Normandy.

“There were men in the hospital who somehow got word of the impending invasion and went awol (absent without leave) from the hospital to join the company. They could
have safely stayed in a rear area, yet they chose to go into combat with their buddies. That takes guts.”

“Then there were a number of awols from the company, plus men in the stockade and troopers involved in fights. Lt Col Vandervoort had to take time to deal with each, dispensing justice with an eye to retaining troopers badly needed for the forthcoming invasion.” Bilich relates that many years later at one of the reunions, someone from the company asked the battalion commander what he really thought of D Company. Col Vandervoort was gracious enough, “Well you were a feisty group but you were all good soldiers and did your job.” After the Normandy campaign Vandervoort won everyone’s respect.

Expressing strong feelings about his relationship with English people and the nearby community, Bilich said, “England was always like home to me. You never heard an Englishman or woman complain. They were short everything, but made the best of it. Life in the community centered on the pubs. Time spent drinking, singing, throwing darts, or just talking or singing. Everyone got along. Every night when it was time to close, the bartender would shout, “Time ladies and gentlemen — that goes for you bloody Yanks too.”

“When we moved to England, I went to demolition school and finished a course in radio communication. I stayed with D Company from December 1943 to December 1945. At the end of the war I didn’t have enough points for return to the states so went on to Berlin with the outfit and served in the 82nd Honor Guard.”

He tells of an unfortunate accident that resulted in the loss of one his buddies on Christmas day. They had been together through all the campaigns. “One thing that really hurt took place during the Battle of the Bulge. On Christmas day the skies cleared and suddenly P-47s appeared and started to attack German positions to our front (The P47, nicknamed “Jug,” served as both a high-altitude escort
fighter and a low-level fighter-bomber). One P-47 dropped a bomb short, landing in the 3rd platoon area with quite a number of men killed. Among them was “Pop” Graig who had gone to North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy and Holland. With the war so close to ending, it just didn’t seem fair. What a Christmas present.”

Referring to his admiration for one of the platoon leaders, Lt. Wray, Belch said, “He never smoked, drank, or swore. He expected everyone to give his best and set a good example; in combat he was equal to a platoon. His tenacity couldn’t be measured. He was written up for the Congressional Medal of Honor but somehow papers got lost so he never got it. D Company has been trying to straighten it out, but no luck so far.

Bilich made the combat jump in Normandy and Holland with “D Company, suffering through the fighting and terrible weather in the Bulge and finally winding up at the Elbe River at the end of the war. “I went through the entire war and never got wounded. Most men in the company were wounded at least once, some two or three times.” He counts himself as being extremely lucky.

In his lifetime, Bilich had established strong bonds with his school buddies and relatives. “But not strong as the bond I had with my buddies in D Company — and that bond exists today. I am proud to have been one of them.”

Source-35
Otis Sampson was known for planting a standard where a standard never flew. With four combat jumps and twice wounded, he was referred to as the “mortar artist” with his section delivering accurate, deadly barrages with a 60 MM mortar. A Thompson sub-machinegun was never far from his side.

Sampson remembers that his section inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy during the different campaigns. Mervyn Shuman, a member of E Company attests to the accuracy of Sampson and his mortar crew in Normandy when they laid down a murderous mortar barrage, pinning Germans along a hedgerow, causing heavy casualties.

Sampson, a mortar sergeant and later platoon sergeant was always out front and always had the time to look out for those under him. An excellent shot from his hunting days he had the ability to sight an object with the correct range. Also as a boxer he was not afraid to mix it up
when necessary. His men responded positively to these characteristics.

Evacuated to a hospital in Florida because of wounds received in Holland with shrapnel in his back, buttocks and arm, Sampson began his book, “Time Out For Combat.”

How did he happen to volunteer for the airborne? Shortly after receiving his induction notice, a neighbor showed him a magazine article urging volunteers for the airborne. Seeing this, Sampson made up his mind. “I had figured troopers would be used in small groups, jumping back of enemy lines and causing havoc, then slip back into friendly territory. I had confidence in my knowledge of woodcraft to outwit the enemy on his own grounds. It would be a challenge.”

Inducted in March 1942, Sampson was somewhat older than others at the age of 31. He had previously served a four-year tour with the Army in the Cavalry, having been discharged in 1933.

So in June 1942, Sampson transferred to Ft Benning, where he completed the four-week jump school. Receiving his wings and assigned to E Company on the same day, he remembers Captain McGinity, a West Pointer. “By his talk and actions, I felt we had a captain who wanted to make our company one to be proud of.”

Training in the Frying Pan area proved to be a challenge with its compass courses, endurance tests and obstacle courses. Sampson, while older than others, proved more than equal to it. He became the first to qualify as an Expert Marksman with the newly introduced MI Garand rifle. When he received instructions on the 60mm mortar from Lt Talton “Woody” Long, Sampson
proved an apt pupil and what he learned would help him in the future.

Long later took over the company, and then became the battalion commander and later the regimental executive officer. He was tall, quiet, a good leader, even-handed but firm with the men and they respected him for it.

Sampson liked wrestling, mixing it up with some of the others including lieutenants Woosley and Peddicord. He also liked to put on the gloves, so he signed up for some of the regimental intramural events having fought in various matches earlier. He had successfully retained his title in the Alabama area when he knocked out the pride and joy of the 504th. Sampson had withdrawn his name from the next card as he was scheduled to fight the same boxer. He didn’t think he had to lick any man more than once in the same tournament and declined to continue boxing. Col Gavin personally talked to Sampson, “I wish you would change your mind. It would be nice to have a champion in our outfit when we go overseas.” Lt Peddicord urged Sampson to reconsider in view of Gavin’s personal appeal. However Sampson had no desire to continue as he had fought well some nine years earlier and done it only to win a belt for his son. He wanted to concentrate on training.

After taking a test given by Capt McGinity, Sampson had his stripes taken away and lost his squad along with other acting noncoms. He received permission to see McGinity who had never given a reason for the loss of the stripes. Sampson felt somewhat resentful. “I had more knowledge of the Army than many officers.” This, however, didn’t limit his praise for McGinity.

Shortly after McGinity was transferred to battalion headquarters, Sampson was promoted to corporal and then got his sergeant stripes back. It was later in Naples, Italy that McGinity apologized to Sampson saying that it had been a mistake.
“Lieutenant Waverly Wray finally became our platoon leader. A dark haired, light complexioned, well-built man — he would go out of his way to help his men, even to the extent of carrying their equipment to give them a breathing spell. I have seen him with two machine guns on his shoulders at one time during endurance hikes. Wray was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in Normandy. There was a concentrated effort to upgrade the award to a CMH (Congressional Medal of Honor) but so far these efforts have proved unsuccessful.

When the 505th moved to Ft Bragg, becoming part of the 82nd Abn Div., there was more training day and night with Lieutenant Long now as E company commander. Sampson finally got a good mortar squad together with Harry Pickels as first gunner, Roy Watts, second gunner, Ralph Honneycut, David Juda and Andrew Piacentino. On April 20, the 505th moved to Camp Edwards, MA and then to NY to board the Monterey for North Africa.

One of those who made the greatest impact on Sampson was Dennis O’Loughlin, a short, light complexioned, blond haired trooper from Montana. “This was the beginning of a close friendship. I liked him because he had many good values. I enjoyed the backcountry hikes we made together on our own spare time. The trips into Columbus GA where the boarding house lady would always find quarters for us on our overnight stays.” Sampson also respected and liked Lieutenant Coyle and they maintained a close friendship after the war. Other officers whose leadership made an impact on Sampson were Col Gavin and Lt Col Ben Vandervoort, the battalion commander.

Sampson remembers the worst of times in Oujda, Morocco, “the daily atabrine tablets, using slit trenches for hygiene that were hidden by canvas walls and infested with swarms of flies. There was always the problem of dysentery during a hot, dusty training march. Not to forget having to drink from the water bag hung under a small
canvas awning at the end of the E Company street. The warm water had an unappetizing chlorine taste.”

It was in Oujda that Sampson felt like a free man after his divorce became final. He was glad to have it over with as his marriage was more or less on the rocks when he left the States.

Sampson and the others in the platoon marveled how Lieutenant Long could lead them on long night marches and when it was over, not showing hardly a wrinkle or any signs of dirt on his jump suit.

In Oujda, Sampson was asked to try his hand at cutting hair. But after waiting to cut an officer’s hair one afternoon in the hot afternoon sun with dust blowing, his enthusiasm became somewhat dampened. When the officer arrived he asked Sampson if he had been cutting hair long and how did he get his start. Sampson told him that he used to clip horses’ hair while in the cavalry. He was not asked to cut hair again.

With the 505th’s first combat jump in Sicily, July 9, 1943, it was a great relief to leave behind the heat, wind and dust of the North African desert.

Sampson landed in an olive tree near two buildings close to a nearby pillbox camouflaged as a haystack. At daybreak Sampson saw the muzzle of a machine gun sticking out from the haystack. His quick thinking with a hand signal managed to stop two troopers from walking into the line of fire. Not wasting any time, he threw a grenade, also cutting loose with his Thompson, knocking out the pillbox.

Sampson zeroed in on a second, nearby pillbox with his 60 MM mortar, not using boosters for the shell because of the close range. A white flag was soon waving. For that day Sampson said, “I didn’t thinks I had done anything exceptional that wouldn’t be expected of others.”
The next combat jump in Salerno, Italy, itself proved uneventful but Sampson and his squad again proved themselves on the field of battle. The action occurred on 6 October 1943 at the Volturno railroad yard about half a mile from Arnone, Italy. When the platoon leader was killed, Sampson went forward across open terrain, under heavy fire, and took command, reorganizing the forward squads and enabling the platoon to continue. Later, he was told that he would receive a Silver Star but in ceremonies in Naples, the award turned out to be a citation for gallantry in action. Sampson thought the citations were changed due to the transfer of his commander and others.

The 505th sailed for Ireland, November 29, 1943 then to Quorn, England where they trained for the Normandy invasion.

For the D-day jump in Normandy, Sampson was number five in the stick with Lieutenant Jim Coyle as jumpmaster. Shortly after landing, Sampson came upon Col. Vandervoort sitting with his back against a wall. He was obviously in pain from his broken leg and said that someone was getting a medic. Sampson saw there was nothing he could do, so turned to go. He remembers a compliment that Vandervoort paid him, “I’m proud to have you with us.”

With Company E attacking north towards Neuville au Plain, Sampson moved his mortar section forward along hedgerows and ditches until he had perfect observation of the enemy, knocking out a machine gun nest with a direct hit, then placing fire on the routes of withdrawal. His accuracy was so effective that the enemy was pinned down completely and his company was able to capture a large percentage of a German infantry regiment. Sampson was awarded the Bronze Star for his action on June 8, near Ste Mere Elise.

Several days later, a piece of shrapnel from a tree burst hit Sampson’s Tommy gun and glanced off into his
back. The medic removed the shrapnel and handed it to Sampson. Later in St Sauveur le Vicomte, Sampson was hit again when a 88mm exploded against a nearby 37 MM gun. It sent a fragment into his wrist, and then deflected by a nameplate on his wrist, the fragment traveled up and into his left arm. Evacuated to the 81st General Hospital at Red Lava, Wales, he had two operations, one that removed the embedded pieces of chain from the name plate from his wrist while the other removed a piece of shrapnel from his elbow that he keeps as a souvenir.

During one of his passes from the hospital, Sampson describes a day that he will always remember as it changed his future life. “I had dropped into a pub that evening and later went to a formal dance at the Cardiff City Hall. My attention was quickly drawn to a slim, young lady who was dancing. She was a well-built girl with dark, long flowing curly hair. Her head was held high as she glided so gracefully across the floor. I had no image of the person that she was dancing with, for my eyes were only for her. As soon as the dance ended, I was standing before her. Her blue eye reminded me of the deep blue Mediterranean Sea. The rest of the dances that night were ours for we never parted and on the closing of the hall she saw me to the bus stop and waited with me until it arrived. It was the beginning of our friendship — from then on we met as often as possible.” Sampson would later marry Marion.

While in the hospital, Sampson received a letter from Lieutenant Coyle, asking if he would take over the 1st platoon as platoon sergeant when he returned. Sampson, finally released, still experienced difficulty in straightening out his hand but he managed to hide the problem from the examining doctor. Sampson returned to E Company on August 24, now back in Quorn.

Presented the Bronze Star for his action in Normandy, Sampson was promoted to staff sergeant, taking over the 1st platoon with Coyle as platoon leader. They both
worked well together. Sampson knew his men and had their confidence.

Then preparations for Operation Market Garden in Holland began. Remembering that in a previous jump equipment bundles had not been properly dropped, Sampson insured that they were correctly loaded.

Capt J.J. Smith was now “E” company commander with Lt Wm Meddaugh as the exec officer. James Coyle had the 1st platoon with 2nd Lt Bales, who was absent training as a pathfinder. The 2nd and 3rd platoon officers were Lt J Phillips, Lt J. Walas, Lt N.Psaki, and Lt Jenson.

For the drop in Holland on September 17, Sampson jump-mastered the C-47 that carried the platoon’s machine gun section and the platoon headquarters. Trouble developed when the engine quit, forcing it to return to the airfield. Equipment and men were hurriedly transferred to a lone C-47 parked along the runway. Taking off, it finally caught up and made the drop successfully.

After bitter street fighting, E Company as part of the 2nd Battalion, pushed into Nijmegen. There Sampson, organizing both mortar squads, took charge, giving the range and fire commands and firing them both at once, side by side.

Severely wounded when hit in the leg, he was carried by jeep to the hospital in Nijmegen. In a visit to the hospital, Col Vandervoort praised him for his leadership and the effective fire of his mortars. From there he was eventually evacuated to the States.

Don Lassen, also a member of E Company and editor of the Static Line, recalled that Sampson was never found lacking and was always there. “He was as good a combat man as we had in the company.” Source 6
W. C. Heinz, one of America’s great sports writers, honed his writing when he was assigned to Europe during WW II to cover combat. In an article about Heinz, “Sports Illustrated” wrote, “He learned that men at war fight Not for causes but for one another And that heroism is a kind of love.”

A Christmas Present

It was Christmas Eve, 1944 and Stanley Miller responded to a call for a volunteer to recover ammunition for 81-mm mortars and 50-caliber machine guns, plus other ammunition and equipment.

The 505th was fighting near Bergavel, Belgium in the Battle of the Bulge. Its ammunition supplies lay in enemy-held territory. The ammunition was vital to the survival of the 505th. But could it be retrieved?

Climbing into the cab of his six-by-six, Pvt. Miller began rumbling down the road toward the town where German troops had dug in for the night.

“I could hear the Germans hollering at me,” he said, recalling those tense moments as he lugged the heavy ammunition boxes and dumped them on his truck. Perhaps the enemy soldiers in the dark took him for one of them; perhaps they were too busy celebrating Christmas Eve to pay much attention. But all of that changed when Miller finished loading, got his truck into gear and gunned it at top speed back through the town toward the American lines. Small-arms fire peppered the truck and the road
around it. “Those German troops let go with everything they had,” he said. “I was lucky to get back.”

His brave act allowed the 505th to keep fighting and remain in action until the German advance ran out of steam.

Miller’s heroism that Christmas Eve earned him a Silver Star for gallantry. He also earned a Bronze Star and has six battle stars. Source: Text from 33
Sounds Of War

Most remembered by paratroopers are some of the more distinctive sounds of German weapons: the overhead crack and boom of the 88 mm gun; the sound of the incoming Nebelwefer “screaming memees” with their multi-barreled rocket barrage; the ripping noise of the MG 42 heavy machine gun, firing at over the rate of 1000 rounds per minute; and last but not least, the very effective anti-tank Panzerfaust.

The German 88mm Gun

The experience of a German 88 mm fired in your direction is unique, never forgotten and remembered especially in Normandy — no doubt about it! The enemy used it as a rifle with a direct fire sight that had an approximately 3½ inch in diameter shell. Men in the 82nd Airborne Division can fully attest to its deadly accuracy. In its direct fire mode, it could pick you off at 2000 yards. More likely though, it would be close in and well camouflaged.

From a written account aboard a destroyer during the landing in the invasion of Salerno, Italy:

The flat trajectories of the 88 mm shell had a unique piercing sound as it passed our #1 stack. We had been used to the fluttery sound of larger projectiles in arched trajectories. Like our 5 inch 38s, most enemy artillery projectiles were subsonic. The 88, I later learned, had a 4,000-foot per second muzzle velocity, and when you
heard the sound, the projectile was long gone. At Salerno ranges, the 88 shell was in a very flat trajectory, where a “miss was as good as a mile”, usually more. They had to hit you directly and hope you had enough metal to set off their fuse, which was essentially designed to be anti tank, armor piercing.

The following text is from source 10:

Only in Japan and, to a lesser extent, in Italy, did military expenditures and weapons development increase significantly. After 1932, Germany embarked upon a major rearmament program under the Nazis. In Japan the need to build an industrial base sufficient to maintain a modern military establishment led to the creation of a military society whose every effort went toward increasing the military prowess of the state. The Japanese reliance on overseas sources for critical raw materials forced it to engage in wars of conquest in Asia to gain control of oil fields, steel deposits, and other raw materials needed as sinews of war. Mussolini’s attempt to make Italy a great power foundered on the insufficient resource base of Italy. Italy never obtained sufficient coal, steel, and oil supplies required by a first-rate military machine. By 1939 when Italian military prestige was at its highest and Italian airplanes, ships, and small arms were among the best quality in the world, the fact remained that Italy’s industrial base was never adequate to sustain a large modern military machine for very long.

Yet, it would be incorrect to assume that the development of weaponry came to a halt during the interwar years. The tank, for example, continued to improve markedly with the appearance of the low profile hull, the revolving turret, better gun sights, and improved tracks and suspension. By the 1930s the Russians had developed the famed T-34, the best tank of its day. Tank cannon grew larger to 90-millimeter guns, and new propellants and shot, the sabot round, made these cannon even more
deadly. The tank called into existence the first antitank guns. The German *Gerlich* gun, for example, fired a 28-millimeter round of tungsten carbide at 4,000 feet per second, and was capable of penetrating any known tank armor. A later German invention, the “eighty eight” was originally developed as an antitank weapon but doubled as both an antiaircraft and direct fire gun. It is generally adjudged the best weapon of its kind in World War II.

**Nebelwefer**

A ruthless piece of equipment. Originally used to lay out smoke, this proved highly efficient against enemy infantry. The Germans were a bit slow in seeing this, but in the end came up with a highly efficient weapon. It was a new German weapon introduced during the North African invasion of 42 - 43. It literally blanketed the area with a half-dozen 75-pound high explosive rounds known as the screaming memees, or moaning minnies, because the wail that was made in flight was said to resemble “a lot of women sobbing their hearts out” (*a remarkably accurate description*). It was much more accurate than its Russian counterpart. However, its range limitations was a big drawback. Source: 10 and *An Army at Dawn* by Rick Atkinson.

**Mg 42 German Machine Gun**

The MG-42 is one of the great guns. Designed and produced during W.W.II when the Nazi war machine was at its apex, the MG-42 used
the same new manufacturing techniques introduced with the MG-40. Where previous guns had been painstakingly machined from bars and forging, using interlocking parts assembled with screws, pins, or rivets, most of the MG-42 was pressed, folded, induction-welded steel. Most of the precision in the gun is in the bolt and barrel extension.

In addition to manufacturing breakthroughs the MG-42 has another feature which makes it one of the most famous and feared (also meanest) guns ever built: a rate of fire over 1000 rounds per minute. This from a gun that can be carried and shot by one or two men. Fewer troops were needed to lay down suppressing fire while others maneuvered. There is no gun that sounds, or shoots like an MG-42. A 50 round belt disappears in a few seconds.

The MG-42 has a legitimate, simple, quick barrel change. The feed cover design is used in several modern weapons. The gun is still made and used, virtually unaltered by Germany, as the MG3. For many years after the war, the MG-42 was made by Yugoslavia as the MG-42/56.

Source: 11

**The Panzerfaust**  
**A German Infantry Anti-Tank Weapon**

The Panzerfaust is a single shot, dispensable anti-tank weapon carried by German anti-tank squads during World War Two. It was small, light, cheap to produce and most importantly, it was a deadly anti-tank weapon. Capable of penetrating up to 200mm (8 inches) of armor, the
Panzerfaust could deal certain destruction to any tank of the World War Two era — German or Allied.

Our regimental commander Colonel James Gavin was so impressed with the Panzerfaust that he used captured Panzerfausts where possible instead of the American issued bazooka. Later after the war, designated as Chief of Research and Development in the Pentagon, he used his field experience in combat to concentrate on development of more effective weapons.

The 80th anti aircraft battalion reported that all batteries were trained to fire the captured German Panzerfaust, maintaining that it was more effective than the battalion’s 57mm (2.2 inch shell) for close-in fighting.

“Lillie Marlene”

There she was, “Axis Sally” broadcasting her greetings, welcoming the 82nd and our regiment upon arrival in Naples. She obtained the names of the individual units and various individuals of the regiment — but how or where? In place of commercials there was the usual propaganda about how Germany was winning the war. “Axis Sally” followed this by a selection of Wagnerian compositions. We enjoyed the music.

Shortly after the invasion of Salerno, “Axis Sally” started playing “Lillie Marlene,” a haunting soldier’s song reflecting the echoes of war. Members of the 82nd remember it well, listening to a rather pleasant German songstress singing with an accent, “Lille Marlene” in English:

“Underneath the lantern by the barracks gate,
Darling I remember the way you used to wait;
’Twas there that you whispered tenderly,
that you lov’d me
you’d always be,

My Lillie of the lamplight,
My own Lillie Marlene.
A MATTER OF PRIDE

Orders came for sailing somewhere over there,
All confined to barracks was more than I could bear;
I knew you were waiting in the street,
I heard your feet,
But could not meet;

My Lillie of the lamplight,
my own Lillie Marlene.

Resting in a billet just behind the line,
Even tho’ we’re parted your lips are close to mine;
You wait where the lantern softly gleams.
Your sweet face seems,
to haunt my dreams

My Lillie of the lamp-light,
my own Lillie Marlene.”

The Sound Of Running Feet

Taking photos of the city early in the day, a lone German recon aircraft flying high over Naples would disappear before our fighter aircraft arrived or the anti aircraft could find the range and open up. Then late afternoon or early evening, the air raid sirens would begin wailing throughout the city as the German bombers arrived. When the sirens stopped, there was only the sound of running feet from hundreds of people on the streets and sidewalks seeking out the closest air raid shelter. There was no shouting or talking, no other noise — just the running feet.

Such a different and unusual sound! Then my running feet added to the sound.

The bombing started.
Some experiences are best told through the words of the individuals themselves. This certainly is the case with Bill Bishop’s account of his life and times in the National Guard and the 505th during WW II. In short sentences he tells of his pride in the airborne, his mistakes and the bonds that he forged in combat.

“I lived in Monticello, Florida, had to quit school. I was without a job, so joined M Company, 124th Infantry, National Guard for the extra money with a place to go on weekends. We were called into federal service on November 10, 1940 and went from Blanding, Florida to Ft Benning, Georgia. Served as assistant instructor at the Officer Candidate School at Benning. Was busted from sergeant and spent a short time in the guardhouse. I put in for transfer to the parachute school and was accepted. At that time I was 17 years old, but turned 18 when I completed it.

“From jump school, I was assigned as charter member of G Company. The first commanding officer was Patrick Gibbons, with Bob Piper as platoon leader and also Jack Isaacs. All were baby faced, very young officers, but very good men. We highly respected them.

“The main reason for volunteering for the airborne was to stay out of the guardhouse, this along with the $50 jump pay. H--- I thought I was rich. Good pay, $30 plus $50 -- lots of good whiskey, plus women -- didn’t kill me though. Good times really rolled, where even the Frying Pan looked good to me! It was a tent area across the Chattahoochee River from Ft Benning in Alabama used for intensive training.
“We had instant promotions in G Company. 1st Sgt Lem Pitts was an experience for us. He was great. I was impressed with our officers and enlisted personnel of the company. I was busted a few times. Was trained and served as an infantry squad leader. Made three combat jumps in Sicily, Italy and Normandy. I was injured in Normandy, German medics checked me on the ground. The 505th medics picked me up and I was evacuated to England. I was in traction over a month. Ended up with an 11-inch plate, six screws — my knee and ankle healed O.K.

“I was one of General Gavin’s boys and we loved that fine man. Would follow him to h --- and back.

“The worst time for me was in Sicily. The first time in combat and losing all my friends. I still hurt remembering them all the way to Normandy.

“My health problems with nightmares are with me, even now, at my age. I have hit my wife and few others with those stupid nightmares. So far nothing serious.

“I was proud of my service in the parachute troops. I would do the same thing again, but a little different. I missed so much by getting busted so much. I was a basic private leading my squad in Sicily; we trained together in North Africa. What a life. I loved the Army, especially the troops, to my grave. Best people in the world. This I know.”
Richard E. “Pat” Reid
H Company

Pat Reid’s account aptly entitled “Chow” is an unvarnished, rear-rank view of his everyday life as he scrounged for food for members of H Company — his number one mission. It’s a glimpse of courage, ingenuity and how, at times, quick wits averted disaster. Also there is a good lesson on how not to improve international relations.

Reid wrote, “Chow” for his family but when a name and incident caught his attention from one of my columns in the Static Line, he decided to send a copy to me.

As always, each outfit seems to have someone who is especially successful in bartering and scrounging for food. Reid was not only that person but also could cook and serve up a fine meal. Col Gavin, a frequent guest for chow said, “I don’t know how you do it, but you are eating far better that we are.” Reid told the regimental commander, “Eat your dinner and never mind where it came from, it will taste the same either way.” Col Gavin replied, “OK Pvt Reid, I think that is a good idea.”

There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that Reid did much to maintain the morale and improve the daily life of the H Company troopers.

“Chow”
by Pat Reid

Pat Reid said he used his real name Richard for roll call but otherwise his buddies called him Pat or Skeeter. He had been assigned to H Company after finishing jump school and stayed with that company until Japan surrendered, surviving all four combat jumps — Sicily, Italy, Normandy, Holland, plus the Battle of the Bulge. He also
participated in the Elbe and Rhine River crossing and the Rhine River and Hurtgen Forest ordeal.

My article in the Static Line caught Reid’s attention concerning Col McIlvoy, the 505 Surgeon. Attempting to retrieve some wounded from the battlefield, McIlvoy had hopped onto a nearby “liberated” truck. Driving it around a bend in the road at Biazza Ridge he came face to face with a German Mark VI tank. It stopped him cold with its 88mm gun.

Reading the account about McIlvoy, Reid had wondered, “As I had left the truck that I was driving at the aid station at Biazza Ridge, I think we might be talking about the same one. It was an old model somewhere in the twenties. Right hand drive, no top, no windshield.”

I checked William Breuer’s book, “Drop Zone Sicily”, which had an account from Lt Ziegler (also H Company) who had brought a load of 12 troopers to Biazza Ridge on an “ancient, wheezing, coughing Italian flatbed truck” that had been commandeered by Corporal Murone. So the “ancient, wheezing, truck” might have been a story in itself; instead it ended up in a heap at Biazza Ridge, a brief moment in history, serving a just cause.

Table Manners

Reid remembers his first encounter with Army food at basic training camp. “Eating with ten or twelve men at the same table, some with the manners of a hog, was a new experience for most of the men. Those with bad manners had to be taught the rules of ‘Emily Post’ when someone short-stopped a bowl of food – that is to empty the bowl of food for himself rather than passing it on to the polite person, who had even said, ‘Please.’ When this happened, it wasn’t unusual for two or three of the more polite young men to offer the ‘short stopper’ a full bowl and then empty it over his head, saying, ‘You wanted food. Now you got it.’ This is not only the way new recruits were taught table
manners but also how they learned to fight. I now know why they are called ‘mess halls.’”

After basic training Reid shipped to Fort Benning, Georgia for jump training, arriving at the hottest time of the year. “The food they served didn’t look too bad, but if you took your eyes off the food and looked at the server and were still able to eat, you had a much stronger constitution than I did.

“The cooks and food handlers were almost all large obese people with no shirts, standing over big pans of grits, black eyed peas and collard greens with no shirts. The sweat poured off into the food, not a very appetizing sight. The PX (post exchange) got most of the food business with hot dogs, hamburgers and a lot of ice cream.

“While at the frying pan, (a training area across the river from Ft Benning) we jumped once a month to get our jump pay. One time we were to have a fun jump. No equipment, just our fatigues, jump boots and helmet liners. They also said we could jump at any altitude between one thousand and five thousand feet. Our plane load chose five thousand feet.”

Reid wrote that as they started taxiing for takeoff, Colonel Gavin ran up to the open door and threw his chute in on the floor. “A couple of men grabbed his arms and pulled him onto the plane. He had already made several jumps that morning, so he knew exactly where the jump field was. Not knowing the instructions that we had given to the pilot and seeing us approaching the drop zones, he gave the order to stand up and hook up. He did not realize that we were flying very low and at full speed. His next command was “GO” and out we went. My chute popped and I landed in a plowed peanut field. I believe it was the softest landing I had ever had — also the shortest. I don’t know the exact altitude that we jumped but different guesses are anywhere from 100 feet to 300 feet.
“I didn’t know anything unusual took place until several weeks later, when there was talk of court marshalling Colonel Gavin.”

From the frying pan, the 505th was shipped to Camp McCall, North Carolina for a short period of time. “There was no training, we spent most of our time playing cards, both for fun and for money. I am not a good card player, but I was unreasonably lucky playing poker. Almost every night I would go to a nightclub in Southern Pines for a delicious T-bone steak. This only lasted for a few days.

“During the week we didn’t get to do much scrounging for food. On the weekends we were given passes. I made my way to Southern Pines for some more T-bone steak. Lots of times I was invited to someone’s home for Sunday dinner. I liked being in Bragg.

“We were making a practice regimental jump in South Carolina. A lot of troopers were in the air at the same time. Somehow there was a mix-up. Planes flew into the descending troopers, killing two of them. One trooper had his chute cut off falling several hundred feet, landing in a small haystack. He was very lucky, walking away unhurt and is the only trooper that I know, who after making his five qualifying jumps, refused to jump again and got away with it. (In mass jumps, aircraft now fly three in a serial of V’s with the lead serial of V’s the lowest, usually at 800 feet. The remaining serials are staggered at higher altitudes with the last serial at somewhere around 1100-1200 feet. This eliminates the danger of an aircraft flying into a serial ahead of them. It takes about 150 C-47’s to fly in and drop a regiment, or 50 per battalion).

Reid skips ahead to the move overseas and to the training areas in the desert of North Africa. After debarking, they remained at Casablanca for several days. “We didn’t get to scrounge for food as we were being scrounged by the native children. Mostly after bon-bons or cigarettes, they would sing ‘Deep in the Heart of Texas.’ I don’t believe
there was one of the children that didn’t know both the words and the tune.”

The regiment moved from Casablanca to Oujda, Morocco near the Mediterranean coast. Reid said that the country was similar to Southern California with rows of attractive modern homes on one side, the other side an old town with adobe buildings, usually a wall surrounding the whole town; very picturesque. “Oujda would have been the place to get something different to eat, but almost every man in camp had the ‘Chinese trots’ or as some called it, ‘Montezuma’s Revenge.’”

A Mass Drop in High Wind

Reid described an exhibition jump in Oujda terming it a disaster. “There was a high wind with a terrible down draft, almost everyone came in hard, actually bouncing when they hit the ground. It put a couple of hundred men in the hospital. (The drop hadn’t been cancelled because of the high number of dignitaries who attended. A jump is usually cancelled with ground winds of 22 mph or more). I know that I came in and bounced several times. After I hit, I lay there a few moments feeling different spots on my body to be sure I had no broken bones. After my examination I decided I was okay. I got up and started to assemble with my company. The first person I came to was one of my company’s lieutenants. He was lying on the ground moaning, ‘I bent my collar bone — I bent my collar bone.””

Reid looked at him and could see his shoulder was sticking straight up. “Sir, it looks to me like you broke your collar bone.” The lieutenant said, “No, dammit. It’s bent. I was in a car wreck in the states and had my right collar bone replaced with a silver one.” Reid said the officer was disappointed because he knew he would have to return to the States and wanted to stay with his outfit.
From Oujda the regiment moved east to Kairouan, Tunisia on the coast of the Mediterranean. They loaded into a C-47 with eighteen men, barracks bags, several five-gallon plastic containers of water, and several cases of C-rations. The pilot told Reid they were overloaded. “I will have to bounce the plane to get it off the ground.” So down the runway they went, as he gained speed, he lifted the plane off the ground. “When we were ten or fifteen feet off the ground, it was back to the ground causing the plane to bounce. He then gave the motors full power and we were soon airborne.”

At Kairouan, they were bivouacked in a field fenced in by a high cactus hedge that was very effective, as nobody went through it. “We were short of everything — food, water, matches, and other common items — no place to scrounge for them. I was fortunate. I had a Zippo lighter and I could refuel it by dipping it in a gas tank or can. I was kept busy lighting other people’s cigarettes. A soldier offered me one hundred dollars for it. Money was no use to me there and I still have the lighter. The chrome and the hinge are worn off, but it still works. I wouldn’t take one hundred dollars for it.”

In a brief description of the combat jump into Sicily on July 9, 1943, Reid said they were scattered over the island. “By daylight, only three of us had managed to get together. While we were looking for our company, we passed a house that we decided that we should check on, not wanting to leave some enemy at our backs. We searched the house including the basement. Not finding anyone there, we did find three big barrels of wine, about three to four hundred gallons each.

“McGillvery with a grin on his face asked, “Would you two care for a glass of wine?” We both replied, “We didn’t care if we did. He then proceeded to put a bullet bole in the center of each barrel. Getting our canteen cups, we each had a little sip of wine. Not spending much time there,
we left in search of our company or any other American soldiers.”

Their first contact with any American troops was a truck driver headed someplace with a load of ammunition. They hitched a ride with him knowing wherever he went there would be troops. Riding only a short distance, they spotted an enemy soldier running across a field who disappeared into a hole in the ground. The driver dropped them off and they crawled up towards the hole with a barbed wire fence around it. While his two friends covered Reid, he crawled over to the hole. “I pulled the pin on a grenade, holding it for quick use if necessary. I yelled at the same time, ‘Come out of there you SOB.’ In just a few seconds, with his hands held high in the air, an Italian appeared, saying, ‘Comrades.’ I spoke again, ‘Come on out.’ He and eighty-two more Italian soldiers came out of the hole. It seems we had stumbled onto an Italian command post.”

Reid said that the command post was in contact with other command posts with news that American paratroopers were dropping in their area. Believing they were completely outnumbered, they surrendered quickly. “They had an old Italian truck which we requisitioned. It had no windshield and no top. We tied a fifty-caliber machine gun on the hood. With one Italian machine gun you can link several belts of ammo together and fire several hundred rounds without reloading.” (This probably was the first reference to several later of the same “wheezing” Italian truck that played a minor role at Biazza Ridge).

Reid mentioned that it must have been close to payday as there were two cardboard boxes of Italian money and also said there were some maps showing almost every Italian command post and combat position on the whole island. He figured that it would be important, so he loaded the maps onto the truck. They lined the prisoners up in a column of fours, with McGillvery and Long in front and Reid in the truck at the rear, heading down the road
towards Vittoria. “As I drove down the street, I started throwing the money to the people in the street knowing that now that Italy was losing the war, the money was worthless. WRONG! The next time we were paid, we were paid in Italian Lira!”

Reid managed to turn the prisoners over to some other troops. Turning around they started back out of town trying to locate H Company. “We did find four or five of our company men in town and they joined us. Just as we were leaving, I saw Sergeant Moxly, one of H Company’s staff sergeants. I stopped and asked if he knew where the rest of our company was. He said he thought he knew and told us. He said he was there at the Third Battalion headquarters as a liaison between the company and the battalion.”

Reid decided to turn the maps over to sergeant Moxly to give to headquarters. Reid ruefully said, “I guess I should have given them to headquarters myself,” as sergeant Moxly was made 2nd Lieutenant in the field of battle because of handing over the maps to the brass.

Quick Wits

Reid with his fellow troopers departed in hopes of finding H Company. Traveling four or five miles from Vittoria they rounded a curve in the road and found themselves face to face with a German Mark VI tank. “One of the men stuck his hand in the air and started yelling ‘Heil Hitler.’ The rest of us caught on and started the same thing. We got by them because of the Italian truck and the fact it was the first time they had seen an American soldier in a jump suit.”

Reid said they were happy and laughing about the incident when they went around another curve and ran smack dab into an American Sherman tank. Someone’s quick wits worked again. One of the group started yelling, “Americans,” pointing to the American flag on his shoulder. “The rest of us did the same thing and we lucked out
again!” It was only a mile or two from there that they found H Company. He said they certainly weren’t bivouacked but were “involved in the hardest fought battle in Sicily at Biazza Ridge.”

David and Goliath

The men were sent to the top of the ridge with J. D. Long and Reid spotting a German tank. Remembering everything taught in training, they believed they could disable it. “J. D. went to the left with his bazooka and I to the right with my two-pound gammon grenade to blow the tracks off. As we were running towards the tank, the turret swung around and fired at J.D. He was hit dead center.” With the turret turning in his direction, Reid dove behind a tree, its trunk at least two and a half feet in diameter. The tank fired and hit the tree about three feet above the ground, cutting it completely in two. “The next thing I remember, trying to stop the flow of blood from my right arm or shoulder. I couldn’t do it, so I thought it best that I get to the aid station on my own. I knew where it was because we saw it when we first got to Biazza Ridge.”

On his way back to the aid station he passed Major Krause (battalion commander) who was “in a fox hole three or four feet deep with the dirt flying.” He told Reid to get back up on the hill or he would shoot him. “I called him a stupid S.O.B. and kept on walking to the aid station. What did Krause do? He kept on digging.”

Reid was bandaged at the aid station and with several others sent to a seaport for evacuation to an Army hospital in Oran. After spending about a month in the hospital, Reid was discharged with several others and shipped to a replacement depot in Tunisia. They were told the jump in Sicily had not been successful and that everyone would be shipped as replacements to regular Army units. Before boarding the train they were issued a complete outfit for each man —— uniforms, shoes, pup tents, mess kits and blankets —— “Oh yes, a mattress cover.”
The train ride was in old 40 and 8 French boxcars that had a small American engine and American engineer. Reid said that he had been a bum for a while in the thirties during the depression, so knew most of the whistle signals that a railroader used, especially the highball, the one giving notice the train was about to move out. “The freight trains had the right of way over the troop trains. Therefore, we were side-tracked, spending over a week traveling around six hundred miles.”

Reid in describing the stopovers in the 40 & 8’s said the Arabs would be there with their fruit and vegetables at almost every stop. “Very little money changed hands. They especially wanted candy and cigarettes; the most prized thing was to get a mattress cover.

“To an Arab it was like getting a new suit of clothes. All they had to do was cut a neck hole and two arm holes and it was ready to wear. The trouble was if you traded off your mattress cover, you wouldn’t be able to pass an equipment inspection. Also, you wouldn’t have anything to trade with at the next stop.”

A Shaky Way To Establish Proper Foreign Relations

When the engineer gave the highball whistle, they pushed the produce back out of the reach of the Arabs and handed them one end of the mattress cover with the other end tied to the wall of the car. “It was surprising how fast some of them could run: eventually the mattress cover was turned loose, used again for the next stop. I’ll admit it was no way to improve foreign relations but getting the produce made a pleasant change when added to our C-rations.”

The appearance of nearby slow-moving freight trains with a variety of cases of rations presented an interesting challenge that Reid found hard to resist.

The facilities for eating at the replacement center presented quite a problem as they were bivouacked near a
recent battlefield with dead animals still lying around unburied. “The swarms of flies were almost impossible.”

They had been at the Repo Depo (replacement depot) a short period of time when an airborne lieutenant talked to the commander of the depot and had all of the airborne men transferred back to their base camps. That way, if transferred to regular army units, they could still possibly be with some of their buddies. “The lieutenant who did this for us was some lucky person. While in Sicily, he had been shot right between the eyes. The bullet went in following the curvature of his skull, exiting low in the rear of the skull. There was not any brain damage. He was well and returned to active duty after less than three weeks in the hospital.”

At the time of Reid’s return to the base at Kairouan, a hundred or so replacements were brought to refill their ranks. Major Krause and Moxly (who is now a 2nd lieutenant.) were sent back to orient the new recruits. They called them out one evening for a talk by Krause and assembled at the base of a small hill. Moxly, earlier in the day, had Reid set up a machinegun on the top of the hill. He was supposed to receive a signal from him after dark, and fire a burst over the heads of the new men.

Reid said with some feeling that Krause “winding up his blow-hard speech made a statement that he was up front on the hill with his men and never once dug in. As you recall, when last seen, he was down in a gully, behind Biazza Ridge, in a hole three feet deep and dirt flying.” Before Reid realized it, he lost his cool and said loudly, “Bull S---” Krause said, “O.K., for that you can walk all night, and we did. I am sorry we had to walk, but I am not sorry for what I said because it was the truth and Krause knew it.”

Reid went on to describe the combat jump in Salerno, Italy. “Our next little outing was Italy. We all landed on our drop zone and the company assembled ok after the jump
and then was assigned to a defensive area at the top of a mountain. As good a shape as we were in, by the time we hauled all our equipment to the top, we were completely exhausted.

Issued K-rations that only lasted a couple of days, they started to miss a good meal, so about the fourth day when an Italian civilian came through the area with a small herd of goats, they waved some Italian money and pointed to a half-grown kid goat.

Making the motions of cutting its throat and nodding yes, the Italian took the money and proceeded to cut the goat’s throat, skinning it the way that Reid said he had never seen before, or ever since.

The next day Capt. Mills had Reid go back with him to the bottom of the mountain. There they received supplies — food, water, ammunition, and best of all, blankets, as it was cold on top of that mountain. One of the local residents, who had lived in Boston, went with Reid and the company commander to the supply dump. Seeing that they needed help to move supplies to the top of the mountain, he started handing them out to a crowd of onlookers, pointing toward the top of the mountain. Men, women and children started to help. A man with six donkeys came by and told what was going on, he proceeded to start packing his donkeys with the water bags and ammo. “There was quite a parade up that mountain. That night our company had full bellies and a warm place to sleep. Out of all this, I learned one lesson; don’t ever try to fry eggs in your helmet.”

H Company moved down the mountain on trucks and through a long tunnel heading north to Naples. Reid had always thought that H Company was one of the first to arrive at Garibaldi Square along with a British tank unit. “But every history book says the British were the first. Depends on who was writing the story, I guess. One thing for sure, we were with the English under General
Montgomery, drawing 10 and 1 rations, a small box of food that was supposed to feed ten men for one day.”

Naples is as far north as they got in Italy. H Company stopped there and was told to guard the dock area with each platoon assigned to a specific area. Company headquarters took over a big old bakery building for their “CP” (command post) that had been used by the Italians to bake large field crackers for their troops.

“British taste for food differs from ours. None of us cared for kidney stew or blood pudding. So, back to food scrounging we went. First off, we found some potatoes and a five-gallon container of olive oil. Sure made dandy French fries.”

Reid was standing in front of the bakery when about five men pushing a large cart loaded with sacks of something started to pass. He knew they were looting so he had them unload the cart in a small room at the bakery. Then he told them to take their cart and leave. “After they left, I thought, dummy, they were probably using the carts for looting. I went to the room to see what they were stealing. It turned out that it was green coffee beans. It was like money in the bank.” In trading, Reid found that the large leg pocket on his jumpsuit would hold enough beans to buy six bottles of champagne. He also found out that his jumpsuit would hold six bottles of champagne without being too noticeable. Later on, “I used them to buy food supplies for our whole company; a whole beef at a time.”

The Perfect Circle

Cargo ships started arriving in the harbor bringing in food for the Italian civilians who had very little after the Germans left. The ships couldn’t get up to the docks, so Italians unloaded them by hand into small boats. Then operating like a giant conveyor belt, a hundred or so men formed in a circle. As they passed a boat, they were handed a case of goods, continuing to walk in the circle. At the
stacks of case goods someone read the labels as the men walked by. When this label matched the stack, he was told to unload there, going back in line, continuing in the circle until he was loaded with another case. This seemed to Reid an odd way to do it, but he was surprised at how much material would be moved in one day.

Watching all this gave Reid an idea, as he knew Jerry would eventually fly over and drop their bombs. The Army quartermasters worked around the clock, hauling material to the front. When there was a bomb scare, Reid said they would stop their trucks and run into a bomb shelter. One evening when the Jerries came over and the quartermasters were parking their trucks, Reid went out and found an empty truck with its motor running, so without hesitating he requisitioned it.

The next day, he drove the truck down to where the human chain belt was operating, parking between two stacks of groceries where he could read the labels as they came by. When a man would come by with a case of fruit, pork and beans, or spinach that he wanted, Reid signaled the carrier to put it on the truck.” This continued until I had what I wanted. “Reid said, H Company ate pretty good while in Naples.”

**Bayonets and Bread**

When they first arrived at the bakery, Reid was sent to check out the building. Not finding anyone, he did find a room that had about fifty Italian bayonets in it. Reid said he quickly found a hiding place for them knowing their value as souvenirs.

A man came in one day and asked if they could use a barber. “Capt. Mills said yes, and had Reid fix him a place to work. He, at once, had more business than he could handle. In addition, we had him bring in a young boy, a boot black about fourteen wanting work so Reid had him start up one of the ovens. “There were tons of coal that we
could use together with huge ovens; two trays about eight feet by fourteen. You could probably bake two hundred or more loaves of bread at a time. I was sort of a volunteer cook for our platoon.”

One day, having saved up some small packets of lemon-ade powder, Reid made a couple of lemon pies. While they were baking, a couple of Navy men came in and asked if he was the one with the bayonets for sale. He said yes, but they would have to wait until he checked the pies. Reid started pulling this large tray out of the oven and in the middle were these two nine-inch pies. “The eyes of the Navy men got as big as the pies, and they started laughing. Then one of them asked, “Do you keep this oven going all the time?” Reid assured him that he did, that they had plenty of coal, and “besides that, the young boy kept the fire going and brought me a gallon of sherry wine every morning. He told me the city water wasn’t fit to drink, guess he was right. I wouldn’t know. I never drank the water. I sure wanted to keep him busy.” The Navy men told Reid they were bakers on one of the ships, and that one of their ovens had broken down and they couldn’t get it fixed for a week or so. Asked if they could use the ovens, Reid told them they were free to use them, and that he would share the bread when it was done. They did this for several days until their oven had been fixed. While they were there, they taught Reid how to make bread. They needed flour, sugar, salt and yeast. Reid managed these ingredients the same way he got the case goods but the hardest thing to get was the yeast. He managed to talk some of the bakers on the ships into giving him some. Reluctant to give any at all, Reid offered one of the Italian bayonets for a five-pound can of yeast. “In no time at all we had more yeast than we really needed.”

“You are probably wondering why so much food for so few men. By now we were feeding the whole company — about one hundred and thirty-five men. We set up
the enlisted men’s mess upstairs and an officer’s mess downstairs.”

A large church next door that had been bombed, contained small dining tables, chairs, silverware, tablecloths, and plates that made a dining room for the enlisted men. “Of an evening we had two Italian men and one of their daughters play their violins and sing for us.”

They requisitioned three army field stoves, two for upstairs and one for the officer’s mess downstairs. “Pauly and I did the cooking downstairs as the regular cooks had been in the base camp in Sicily. When the cooks did show up, Capt Mills had them return to regimental headquarters company.

“All good things must come to an end. One day we loaded on a Henry J. troop - carrier ship (Liberty ship) bound for Northern Ireland. The crowded ship had narrow bunks stacked on top of each other with about sixteen inches of clearance between each bunk, and stacked eight high. Of course, the man in the top bunk was always the first to get sick and it wasn’t long before those below him were just as sick.” There was little talk of food on this trip.

“Twenty-one days later we arrived in Ireland. Except for training, we were not allowed out of camp. This curtailed our scrounging for food.”

Making a short voyage they arrived in England for a train ride to Camp Quorn. (This would be the regiment’s base and training area for the invasions of Normandy and Holland). “Food was fair except when they baked turkeys that had been frozen for World War One! Never drawn (cleaned) until thawed and cooked, the garbage cans contained attractive slices of turkey, all tasting like the inside of the intestines.”

Reid bought a bicycle and every evening he was off to the little town of Rothly. There he would get a large order
of fish and chips, then go to the pub for a glass of mild and bitter to wash it down.

Sometimes 1st Sergeant Taylor and Reid would go out together. “When we came back to camp through the guard gate, one of us would start staggering (sometimes we were staggering before this), waving a bottle of hooch. It never had more than a short shot left in it. The guards would tell you to give it to them, Your buddy putting up a little argument would then grab you and holding you tight against himself, saying, “Come on, give them the bottle. You know you can’t bring liquor into camp.” You would give the guards the bottle; your buddy would continue to push you on toward your company area. When you got out of the sight of the guards, you would separate; taking the full bottle you had between you, having a nip or so, also a good laugh. Usually there was enough left over for a shot after dinner.”

While in Normandy, they were kept too busy to do much in the way of supplementing food rations. Being company headquarters platoon, they did sometimes set their command post up in a deserted farmhouse. “Then we would find a live chicken that didn’t stay alive very long. Where there were chickens there were usually eggs. Flour was usually available though trying to tell what was baking powder was sometimes a chore. Some of the farms had home canned fruits and vegetables. We managed to come up with a pretty good substitute for K-rations.”

In Holland after their jump at Groesbeek, the company command post was in a very old building. The building was made with common red brick, with walls at least six or seven feet thick. There was a moat around the fort with the dirt that had been removed to make the moat, piled between the moat and the fort. This made a dirt wall about 20 feet high.

The Germans had placed four 88mm anti-aircraft guns inside the fort and left them damaged. “Sergeant Edwards
found some tools, and was able to make one gun operative. There was plenty of ammunition so we made the German pilots pretty nervous before they got out of the area. In fact, our gun crew had two positive and one maybe, before they quit coming over. At this same time, the British soldiers were coming back through our lines from Arnhem. We were there only a few days before we were sent to a position at a brick kiln near Gent."

Reid said the road into the kilns was nothing but a bog and it was impossible to get there by truck. "Everything had to be packed in by hand, and four miles was as close to our position as we could get." Reid reported that there was a small barn with harness for three horses and two wagons. One had a tongue while the other had two shafts. He noted that there were three big workhorses in the field, all weighed in excess of two thousand pounds. "Being an Arizona farm boy, I was able to soon solve the problem of supplies. I would go in and out after dark with the team of horses. I would just hitch the big old lovable mare to the wagon and she would follow me wherever I would drive the team. It was almost like being home doing this. I had to work most of the night, but I really enjoyed it."

Every week or ten days, they were relieved by a Canadian company and sent to the rear for a week or so. There they would set up in some farmhouse. Being under the British, they were still getting "ten in one rations."

Most of the farmhouses had root vegetables stored such as potatoes and carrots; Reid improved this by butchering a young steer. "One other thing we got with British food rations was a ration of liquor. The officers received whiskey; the enlisted men received a rum concentrate. It was to be diluted half and half with water. We had a better idea. There was a large glass bowl in the farmhouse. The officers donated their liquor and the enlisted, their rum. Mixed together in this large bowl, it made a pretty fair punch. We didn’t need the water after all."
Finally sent home, Reid said “What a treat getting home and to my Grandfather’s house. He served my favorite dinner: Pinto beans with bacon rind with plenty of black pepper and chili peppers, baking powder biscuits and sweet milk. Yum! Yum!

Oh, yes! The radio call code for the captain was “Chow Hound 1101.” Second in Command “Chow Hound 1102,” First Sergeant “Chow Hound 1103.” I’m not as big a chowhound as you might think. My call name was “Chow Hound 1107.”

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The following text and photos are presented to show the importance of rations and how they affected not only the ability but also the will of the average soldier to accomplish his mission. This overview also shows how the ever-familiar rations of D, C, K and 10-in-One were developed during World War II.

HISTORY OF RATIONS

Long before Napoleon uttered his now famous words, “an Army travels on its stomach,” much thought had been given by warring nations to the problem of providing nourishment for their fighting men. The Greek and the Roman warriors, Frederick the Great, and Wellington, all were cognizant of the need for good food supplies, and of the dire effect that a lack of suitable provisions had upon the morale, esprit de corps, discipline, and physical condition of an army.

Early American Rations

At the opening of the Revolutionary War, the colonies fed their own militia. Once the Army had grown, and had taken on a uniform character, the problem of feeding became both acute and difficult. Shortly after George Washington was elected Commander in chief, the Continental Congress created a Commissary General
of Stores Provisions. Joseph Trumbull, who had distinguished himself in feeding the Connecticut militia, was appointed to fill the job. The earliest legislation fixing the components of the Army ration was passed on November 4, 1775. A ration is the allowance of food for the subsistence of one person for one day.

**Further Development in Ration Research**

Little attention was given to this ration until 1937 when W. R. McReynolds, the first director of the new Subsistence Research Laboratory inaugurated studies for the purpose of revising the reserve ration, and supplementing it with prepared meals in tin cans, such as beef stew, beef with noodles, etc. In 1938, Major McReynolds completed his work on the ration and called it a combat ration. It was presented to the Quartermaster Corps Technical Committee that approved it with the recommendation that a further study be made with a view to increase the caloric value of the ration. On 1 November 1939, the Adjutant General announced the adoption of field ration C. It consisted of 3 cans containing a meat and vegetable component, and 3 cans containing crackers, sugar, and soluble coffee. This furnished 2974 calories, 114 grams of protein, and an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals.

**Spirit Rations**  
*(Yes, There Was A Ration For Rum)*

The gill (4 oz.) of rum that had been added to the ration in 1785 was reduced in 1790 to one half a gill of rum, brandy, or whiskey. Four years later, a congressional act authorized that to such troops as are, or may be, employed on the frontiers, and under such special circumstances, as in the opinion of the President of the United States, may require an augmentation of some parts of their ration, the President may be authorized to direct such augmentation as he may judge necessary, not to exceed one-half a gill of rum or whiskey in addition to each ration.
Coffee, And Sugar Substituted For Rum

The additional one-half gill of rum for those employed on the Western frontier was cut by an act of Congress in March of 1795. The spirit ration was increased to one gill again in July 1795, which lasted until 1832 when the rum ration was eliminated, and coffee and sugar were substituted. This coffee and sugar allowance was increased in 1838. The Congressional Act of 1846 allowed commutation in money for the extra spirit ration, which was allowed to enlisted men engaged in the construction of fortifications or the execution of surveys. This refers back to an act of 1799, which authorized the issue of spirits “in case of fatigue service, or other extra occasions”, and was not affected by the act of 1832, which discontinued the regular spirit ration. In 1865, a General Order from the War Department finally discontinued this special spirit ration as well.

(Of the various rations available during World War II, those described and shown below were the most familiar, boring, and monotonous to paratroopers in World War II. They especially remember how rations were bartered and negotiated. Some liked the breakfast ration and would exchange a lunch or dinner for it. Others liked the lunch and would give two breakfasts for it – as a further refinement, those who smoked would offer several parts of different rations for cigarettes).

Field Ration D

Colonel Paul P. Logan, who worked on its development from 1933 to 1937, developed field ration D. This ration in no way resembled the old World War I ration, which has been called the Armour ration, or the reserve ration of 1922. It consisted of a chocolate bar, stabilized to a high melting point by the inclusion of oat
flour, and it provided 600 calories. Three 4-ounce chocolate bars constituted one ration.

Field ration D proved to be convenient and versatile; it can be called the first modern emergency ration. Because it did not provide the soldier with 3 full, palatable, and nutritionally balanced meals per day, it was felt that another ration was needed. Early in 1932, a Sanitary Corps Reserve officer submitted “a balanced meal in a can”, which consisted of a pound of stew composed of 12 vegetables, and 9 meats mixed in the proportions supposedly required to make a well-balanced meal and alleged to contain all the necessary vitamins and minerals.

**Type C Rations**

The other Army ration available when the country entered World War II, Field Ration, Type C, as a ration of meat and bread components, had the prewar characteristics of the 1918 “reserve ration” but had a better balance than its predecessor, good keeping qualities, and sturdy packaging. Its disadvantages were that it was troublesome to carry and that its manufacture posed difficult production problems. These difficulties provided the incentive for the improvements that produced today’s individual “combat” or C ration. The ultimate form in which this ration emerged from the war, however, came only as hostilities were ending and before wide distribution could be made.

A major problem of the C ration concerned its meat components. Procurement was at first of necessity confined to items that could be produced in volume and variety in consequence was of secondary importance. Hence, the early waves of criticism from the field were aimed at the monotonous meat diet offered by the first C ration. Troops not only encountered repetitious meat-and-hash
combinations but also met them on returning to central messes where they were served duplicates of these combinations in B rations. It was little wonder that there was much early denunciation of the C ration.

Until early 1944, separate specifications were used for the so-called B or bread unit of the ration and for related components. In June of that year, the component specifications were consolidated into one specification. The varieties of canned meats were meat and beans; meat-and-vegetable stew; meat and spaghetti; ham, egg, and potato; meat and noodles; pork and rice; frankfurters and beans; pork and beans; ham and lima beans; and chicken and vegetables. The unpopular meat-and-vegetable hash and English-style stew—which were the first additions to the original three—were abandoned because of poor acceptance.

The K Ration

Neither the C nor the D ration filled the need for a special ration suitable for use in highly mobile warfare. The D ration was intended to allay worst hunger of a single missed meal; the C ration was considered too heavy and bulky for mobile units. Dr. Ancel Keys, Director of the Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene at the University of Minnesota, first suggested a ration to be used for parachute troops, tank corps, motorcycle troops and other mobile units. Several organizations worked on the specifications prescribed by Dr. Keyes for such a ration. The final result of this work was the ration officially designated as field ration, type K. The letter K had no particular significance; it was chosen merely to have a phonetically different letter from the letters C and D. The K ration was officially adopted in 1942. It was packed in 8 units, and yielded approximately
8300 calories, 99 grams of protein, and was slightly under specifications in minerals and vitamins as recommended by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council.

**The 10-in-One Field Ration**

The possibility of packaging the type B field ration in units of 10, with an approximate weight of 50 pounds, was suggested as early as 1941. But little or nothing was done about this suggestion until the spring of 1943. At that time, conditions in the battle areas called for such a type of ration. The purpose of this ration was to serve as the principle ration for subsistence of troops in all areas in advance of the field kitchen, but prior to engaging in actual combat, for troops isolated in small groups, and for highly mobile troops. The general specifications for the ration were set in early 1943, and by the end of April of the same year the project had been completed. Several late changes were effected on the ration before it was finally adopted in the fall of 1943.

The 10-in-1 ration is composed of 5 menus, varying in calories between 8500-4050 and supplying between 91 and 121 grams of protein. The vitamin and mineral content was slightly below requirements, and the ration weighed 5 more pounds than specifications called for. The present 5-in-1 ration replaces the 10-in-1 ration.
CHRONICLE THIRTY-THREE

Dennis Force
I Company

Eighteen-year old Dennis Force saw a movie about para-
troopers while undergoing infantry training at Ft Lewis. He said the film projected such a challenge that, together with the boots and airborne wings, he and his buddies decide to go airborne.

Force, short and a lightweight, kept his fingers crossed thinking about the physical. He managed to get through until the last step when he failed to qualify three pounds below the weight of 130. The doctor told him, “Go see your mess sergeant, drink some milk, eat some bananas and come back tomorrow.” The mess sergeant, who had other things on his mind, proved to be quite uncooperative, so Force ate his way through food in the Post Exchange, reporting back to the doctor. All his eating was to no avail; he seemed stuck on 127 pounds. The two different doctors asked him, “Do you really want to be a paratrooper?” Each time he replied with some feeling, “Yes sir, I sure do.” Their verdict, “Let him go”, and they marked him accepted for the airborne. “Best three words I ever heard.”

Assigned to I Company in July 1944 while the 505th was in Quorn, England. Force was accepted at once. He credits Charles Matash, his squad leader in the third platoon, for having the biggest impact on him. Matash provided advice that helped him and the squad to survive together in combat. “When he told us something — it was important. He would tell us to watch the older men. See how they handle themselves in combat.” His squad got six new men after Normandy. Five survived the war with one killed in action and five wounded.
After making the Holland jump, Force was wounded during the bitter and intense battle for Fosse, Belgium on January 3, 1945.

Force mentions the Battle of the Bulge as the worst of times, while “the good times were in Quorn and the months in Suippes before the Bulge.”

Force recalls an experience in Berlin that has remained with him forever. It occurred while he was assigned as gate guard at the residence of General Lucius Clay who had been appointed military governor of the US zone in occupied Germany. Designated commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army European early in 1947, Clay directed the 1948-49 airlift of supplies to the Allied sectors of Berlin, cut off from the West by a Soviet blockade.

The following best describes General Lucius D. Clay with text and photo taken from the Truman Library:

“The son of a former US senator from Georgia, a distant relative to Henry Clay, he became ‘the great compromiser.’ Among his close friends was James Byrnes, Truman’s Secretary of State from 1945 to 1947. Although Clay had political connections, he was not a political general, but a professional officer and engineer. He graduated from West Point in 1918 and served in a variety of engineer officer assignments between the wars. Soon after Pearl Harbor, he, as many of his classmates who had languished for 20 years in the peacetime army, was rapidly promoted to brigadier general and became Director of Materiel of the Armed Service Forces. Later he was appointed as Byrnes’ deputy at the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion. Eisenhower, with whom Clay had served in the Philippines, asked for him when the supply bottle-
neck at Cherbourg, France caused a major problem. Clay quickly resolved it.

“Although Clay constantly strove for a combat command, his superiors consistently desired to use his talents in other areas. He was described as a brilliant administrator and leader, who worked incredibly long hours, with a retentive mind and the knack of extracting the essence of a memo at a glance. On the minus side, he was considered unyielding when opposed and — sometimes to his detriment — given to trigger quick decisions.

“Clay was named Military Governor and US Commander in Chief in Europe. From then until his departure in May 1949, he was America’s proconsul in Europe with almost unlimited authority.”

Dennis Force continues, “Shift hours were two hours on, two hours off, starting at 1800 hr until 0600 hr the next morning.”

About midnight, one night, the general’s car drove up to the gate, stopped and the general rolled down the rear window to say good evening. “He chatted a moment and said, It’s not a very nice night, is it?” It was miserable, rainy and cold. He told the driver to get some help so Force and the other guard wouldn’t have to stand in the rain. After delivering the general, back came the driver and a houseboy with a patio umbrella and two chairs. A night or two later, the general again stopped to chat. This time he instructed the driver to bring down the spare car so the guard detail could stay warm — but that there should be one man on duty at all times. The driver drove back with a Cadillac, leaving it without saying a word. “We figured that wasn’t the way to pull guard duty, sitting in an automobile.”

Force pulled the last guard detail on November 12 from 0400 to 0600 before being relieved by the 78th Div. The general came in through the gate at 0550, stopped and
asked that they come up for something warm after 0600. “Sitting with his aide and the sergeant having a hot drink when we came in, the general asked us what we would like, “I said hot chocolate would be fine. The General asked us where we were from, what we did in the war. We wondered how this general, busy as he was, the most important man in the Allied Occupation Forces, had time for a couple of GI’s who guarded the gate at his home.”

Force ended his account by saying, “I was extremely proud to be a paratrooper. It was no doubt the best thing that ever happened to me. We were lucky enough to serve in the best airborne regiment in the Army. I wear my wings on my cap everyday.”
Gerald Johnson
C Company

A quiet person, Lieutenant. Gerald “Johnny” Johnson led his platoon by example during the intense and bitter fighting in Normandy near the bridge at La Fiere after D-day. Dutch” Schultz, a member of C Company in Johnson’s platoon, said that Johnson was “one of the best and bravest combat officers in any man’s army.” Shultz more than once watched him sitting off by himself, during a lull in a battle, deeply engrossed in his Bible. “It was as if he was sitting alone in church.”

During the Holland campaign, Capt Anthony Stefanich the company commander was hit while leading elements of his company under fire. This caused a smoke grenade in his backpack bag to detonate. Schultz said, “His life was saved by Lieutenant Johnson who crossed the road under fire, jumped on “Stef,” smothering the fire. Then, running to the rear, he picked up a smoke grenade, pulled the pin and threw it, providing cover while carrying “Stef” to safety and medical care.”

But back to the beginning, Johnson tells of the rather circuitous route that led him to the airborne. His reason for joining the paratroopers was not really the desire for a more adventurous career in the Army but rather the result of some unpleasant experiences in the 5th Armored Division.

Graduating from Officer Candidate School at the Armored Force School at Fort Knox, Ky., he was sent to the 5th Armored Division and desert maneuvers in California.

Johnson and four other “ninety-day wonders” returning after a three-day pass took the wrong road from Los Angeles to Needles, California. Johnson, the only sober
one, took over driving, turned the Model A Ford around trying to make up for lost time. Stopped for speeding, a state trooper told him that he wouldn’t get a ticket but would be reported to his commanding officer. Johnson said, “Later, I wished he had given me a ticket.” His company commander and battalion chewed him out but the matter ended up at division headquarters, where Johnson found the commanding general “the most understanding of all.”

Then, a few nights later while attending a movie at the regimental theater, his commanding officer seated behind him noticed that Johnson was out of uniform. He called this to Johnson’s attention and wanted to know, “Do you have a death wish?”

“A few days later, the request for the paratroopers was posted and I hastened to sign up. I figured that I had worn out my welcome with the 5th Armored Division. I was 24 years old at that time.”

After jump school, Johnson was assigned to a replacement group and joined the 505th in Oujda, North Africa. He vividly remembers Lt. Col. Gavin’s welcome to the group of 2nd lieutenants. “He hardly spoke above a whisper, but I was impressed as I had never been impressed by a speaker before. That respect continued to increase through Sicily, Italy, Normandy, Holland and the Bulge.”

In an account written shortly before his death, Johnson wrote, “I was and am proud to have been a member of C Company and also proud to have been a close friend of “Stef.” (Anthony Stefanich, the company commander). He was out in front of his company at La Fiere Bridge when “Stef” was wounded and out in front when he was killed in Groesbeek, Holland. He was a real leader.”

Johnson told of a bizarre incident in Sicily, when about 100 paratroopers gathered at the foot of a hill at daybreak, saw trooper Mike Scambulerri running down the hill
towards them. “He had been captured by Italian soldiers, tied up, shot and injured by a grenade, but when we saw him running, he had managed to escape. He was evacuated to a British Red Cross ship. As he was being loaded onto the ship, the German Air Force bombed it and Mike was moved to another ship. He and Lieutenant Sanders were sent to a Tel Aviv hospital. Mike died after a few weeks. He was in my platoon.”

In another bizarre incident, Johnson wrote of the jump in Salerno when Fred “Shorty” Staten, jumping last in Johnson’s stick, moved so slowly that a gap developed between himself and Harry King, the jumper in front of him. “King jumped and hollered “route step” (break cadence) to the crew chief, who thinking that King was the last man, stepped into the doorway. Then the last man “Shorty” went out the door and took the chief with him. The chief had a chute but it was unbuckled and he was killed. Shorty suffered a back injury, rejoined us in Ireland when he verified the story.”

In Normandy near the Montebourg Station, Colonel Mark Alexander, his runner and Johnson were walking down a road when a mortar shell hit near them. A piece of metal hit his runner but neither Alexander nor Johnson was touched. “I have tons of respect for Mark Alexander. He was as cool under fire as any man I have ever seen.”

Johnson was rotated to the States in January 1945 on a recreation furlough. “I was blessed and did not have to go through the torturous attack in the Hurtgen Forest.” Johnson made four combat jumps and was wounded during the fighting in Normandy, nine days after D-day.

After the war, as editor of the company newsletter, he was instrumental in keeping the members together.
Bill Shattuck
Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion

Rapidly becoming a pivotal point in American history with United States beginning to act like a great power, the battle that raged overseas for North Africa started on September 1, 1939. Germany overran Poland and the Polish Army surrendered a week later.

There was in the United States a continuing and urgent need in the Army for conscription as well as for volunteers. Divisions were activated in rapid sequence, with Army reserve and National Guard units federalized.

Bill Shattuck volunteered for service on September 7, 1942. Leading a charmed life, he made four combat jumps without a wound.

Volunteering and completing basic training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, Shattuck was sent to Fort Benning for parachute training. He qualified for his wings on January 30, 1943.

While at Ft Benning, Shattuck learned the basics of demolition as well as becoming qualified as a 60mm and 80mm mortar crewman. “This really stood me in good stead throughout my service in Europe.” Transferred to the 505th, he was assigned to Headquarters Company of the 3d Battalion. “We became a close knit group, determined to be the best. We seemed to do everything all the way.”

The division sailed overseas, arriving in North Africa on May 10, 1943. “Within a few days we boarded a train for our training camp just outside Oujda, a huge desolate dust bowl. The heat was terrible! On a practice jump, I received my only war injury — a badly sprained ankle. They taped
me up and I returned to duty. I didn’t miss a single day or a single exercise.”

“The temperatures were so high, the heat so intense during the day, that our training became night compass marches. There were compass courses and mock warfare battles with other troopers for three or four hours at a time.

“On one of these night marches, Captain Kirkwood exclaimed, ‘I believe we’re lost.’ He told me to check the map to find out where we were. I took the map under a raincoat with a flashlight and started to laugh. The captain wanted to know, ‘What’s so funny?’ I said, ‘Captain, according to the map, Sir, we are in Alabama.’ We never let him forget this one. He had absent-mindedly forgotten that he was carrying a map from the States. “As a reminder, the headquarters personnel put up guideposts at the company streets in camp — he took all this with good humor.

“The training was demanding and in addition there were often parades in dress uniform for the many distinguished visitors. After six weeks, the division moved by train to a new camp in Tunis. Rumors were that volunteers were needed for guard duty on an ammo train.” As a chance to have a little freedom to do something different, one of Shattuck’s buddies said, “Hey, Shattuck, let’s go!” So they volunteered for a ride they would never forget. Finding themselves on a train from Oujda to Tunis with only flat cars, they traveled about 650 miles through the mountains and tunnels. The two coal burning engines, “just about killed us to breathe.” Arriving in Tunis they were blacker than the coal itself and probably wished that they had used the division transportation’s truck and train.

In Tunis, the regiment trained for Operation Husky, making its first combat jump on Sicily July 9, 1943. Shattuck jumped as a mortar man, landing near Biazza Ridge where a major battle erupted.
Finishing our campaign in Palermo, the 505th returned to North Africa to prepare for its next combat jump in Salerno, Italy. From there, the regiment moved up the coast to Naples in September 1943. Shattuck was part of the battalion given the mission of reestablishing and maintaining order in the city while the other two battalions were sent north to assist the British on the Volturno River.

In November 1943, the 505th sailed from Naples to Belfast, Ireland. “We relocated to England where we set up our tent city in the small town of Quorn. Here the replacements trained with us and we continued to recuperate. This was a period of intense training in preparation for the Normandy invasion. I missed the friends that I had fought with and lost in Sicily and Italy. It was hard and we all matured the hard way. We knew what to expect.”

Shattuck made his third combat jump on D-day after taking off from Cottesmore Airfield in England. “With many new faces and a few veterans like myself, we were anxious to get there and get it done.” He made a safe but lonely landing before midnight. With the 82nd and the 101st scattered over many miles, “It was three or four hours before I met up with other troopers near Ste. Mere Eglise. We were surrounded by German troops.”

After six miles of careful travel, troopers from the 101st and 82nd came across a wounded Major “Cannon Ball” Krause, the battalion commander. “At this time we were about 100 troopers who fought our way into Ste. Mere Eglise, capturing the town by dawn. Most of the troopers who had landed in or very near the town had been killed.

“The city controlled power, railroads and roads to the Cherbourg Peninsula. After winning our hard fought battle, Major Krause had us set up roadblocks to protect Ste. Mere Eglise.
“After the nightmare of Normandy, the 505th sailed back to England. Again many of my friends were left in Normandy. I felt so blessed to have lived through the invasion. We went back to Quorn to fill our ranks and recuperate. Headquarters company looked like a new company as we had suffered heavy losses with very few surviving Sicily, Italy and Normandy. The new troopers trained hard. We had to be ready for Holland and Operation Market Basket.”

Making his fourth combat jump on September 17, 1944, Shattuck wrote, “In Holland our objective was Groesbeek and to take and hold the bridges over the Waal and Grave Rivers at Nijmegen. After a hard fought battle, the 505th again achieved its objectives.”

While fighting in Nijmegen, Shattuck and two other troopers captured a German flag from one of their headquarters. Signing the flag, Shattuck later donated it to the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, N.C. In December 1944, after nearly two months on line, the regiment returned to Suippes, France with the chance to unwind, visit Rheims and train replacements once again.

When the Battle of the Bulge started on December 18, the regiment was trucked to Belgium for the Ardennes campaign. “We were not at full strength and froze in the forest of Ardennes. Finally the German Army was pushed back into Germany.”

Shattuck said the 82nd’s last battle was at Ludwigslust, Germany where the 21st German Army surrendered to General Gavin. “This was a huge Army surrendering to a much smaller force.”

“Nearby was the concentration camp of Woebelin. I had witnessed a great deal of misery and seen countless dead comrades, but nothing I had seen even began to compare
to the atrocity of Woebelin. It was unbelievable and I shall never forget the anguish of these people, mostly Jewish.

“During May through July, 1945, those of us with 85 points or more were sent to the 17th Airborne Division to be shipped home for discharge. A friend and I revisited England for a break while we were waiting.” They missed the departure for sailing, so they had to go home later with the 101st.

“I was sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey, honorably discharged on January 3, 1946.

“I’ll never forget the brave troopers who fought with me. We shared more than I can retell.”

In 1999, Shattuck and his wife traveled with the C-47 Club to celebrate the 55th D-day anniversary. “The people in England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands gave us a warm and appreciative welcome and we will always be grateful to them.

“I’m still going strong and thank God to be airborne.”
Jerry Huth  
Regimental Headquarters Company

As a member of a newly created pathfinder group, Jerry Huth jumped in Salerno, Italy, using a new Rebecca-Eureka homing system with a quick-release bag that contained a responder system combination for directing aircraft to a drop zone. Airborne troopers did not “deliver” the spearheads; they were the spearheads. The delivery technology of that era was primitive compared to the present state of the art. With the pilots identifying a landmark in the light of a partial moon, they used imprecise navigational technology, such as the Rebecca-Eureka and Gee that helped confirm their positions together with dead reckoning. Troop carrier communications between ground and air — so vital for air supply of paratroopers in the period before they linked up with ground units — was poor to non-existent until the spring of 1945. Source 32

At the start of World War II Jerry Huth wanted to join his friends, so he visited an Air Force recruiting station but was told, “to lose about twenty pounds to meet their requirements.” With a rigorous diet, he lost weight in a couple of weeks, passing the physical and mental tests. Accepted for flight training, he failed the blood pressure check. Much to his chagrin he was told, “Sorry son, your blood pressure is too high for the Air Force. We can’t take you.”

Huth, discouraged, took the ferry back to the mainland, walked to the Navy recruiting office and was accepted for the Marine Corps, or so he thought. However after undergoing a physical, he was summoned before a medical officer and again heard, “Sorry, your blood pressure is too high.”
Disappointed and feeling embarrassed about the two rejections, “Off I went, this time to the U.S. Army recruiting office on South Street. There I saw a parachute poster and signed up. I would fly.” Huth was sworn in, took basic training at Fort Dix, NJ. and then sent to parachute school. Again he faced a physical and a blood pressure test. “The staff sergeant taking my pressure hesitated, but I passed, I passed!”

After jump training, Huth was sent to the Frying Pan, a training area across the Chattahoochee River in Alabama, where he was assigned to the 505th. Attending communications school, he also had a “smattering” of training in demolitions. He remembers his first company commander as a bald-headed captain who wore his overseas hat “at a very jaunty angle.”

During the small unit and regimental training, Huth was assigned at various times as radio operator to Lt. Col. Gavin, the regimental commander. “It was during those Frying Pan jumps and operations that I came to respect his quiet manner and command ability. This respect grew as I served as his radio operator in various campaigns as well as my regard for his devotion to his men as a front-line general.”

With the regiment marshaled at the airport waiting for the word to go on D-day, Huth said that while walking guard, he noticed a flurry of paper scattered about. On closer inspection, he discovered that the paper was U.S. currency. His first thought, “Are they testing me out to see if I will leave my post?” Jerry scooped up some of the money and tried to determine the source of this windfall. It turned out to be a crew chief who had a lucky streak in one of those innumerable poker and crap games. Being an honest sort, Huth returned the money but the crew chief insisted that he keep half of it.

The person who most influenced Huth was Leo Girodo. “Leo was some years older than I and sort of took me
under his wing. Leo had owned some restaurants and bars in Pennsylvania. I still remember his waking me at three a.m. in Quorn, England giving me four or five thousand dollars from a crap game to keep for him with a command, ‘Jerry, hold this for me. No matter what I say to you do not give it back to me tonight.’”

Huth thought the worst of times for him was the Bulge. “Wet, cold, no shelter of any kind, inadequate clothing, trench foot, indecision, snow every night, no fires. It seemed utter confusion.” With enough points, he was sent home on leave. The best of times was the decision not to invade Japan.

Proud of his service in the regiment, Jerry Huth made four combat jumps, earning a Purple Heart.

After VJ Day Huth left the 505th in Germany, studied mathematics, receiving his Bachelors and Masters Degree in Engineering and spending 40 years in aerospace. Married with three children, Huth lost his wife Davida, to cancer.
JACK HILLMAN

At the age of 21, Jack Hillman was assigned to a 105-howitzer battalion. He felt that he could be more productive in the airborne. “I wanted to do something that others would or could not do.” The jump pay compensation was an additional incentive.

Hillman, who made combat jumps in Normandy and Holland, joined the 505th in Camp Quorn, Loughboro in early May 1944 shortly before the invasion of Normandy. “I was welcomed by the I company commander, Captain Harold Swingler, and placed under the wing of 1st Lieutenant George Clark, 3d platoon leader. Together with platoon sergeant Clarence Prager, they eased me into the platoon and introduced me to all the men who welcomed me with open arms.

“Lieutenant Clark was most helpful in a very quiet manner, always taking time to insure that we were informed. My best buddies were Jim Cruseberry and Mike Terrela (both deceased).”

Jack Hillman writes this about Sicily, “I don’t know why we were chosen out of the whole regiment, but Bill Dunfee had just made sergeant and was put in charge of a squad that was supposed to guard the tuna fish factory, because some of the natives were getting hungry, trying to break in.

“They left us there and the 505th moved up the coast. We stayed at the factory for two weeks or more, what a
vacation! We ate tuna fish on homemade Italian bread and drank wine. In this compound there were some families with lovely daughters.

“Dunfee should remember all that and Goodson should remember how we tried to pull chicken feathers without hot water. We picked feathers out of our teeth for a week. The chickens were tough but good.

“A lot of the Sicily boys should remember wine kegs, 10 feet tall, when we shot holes into them! — Too slow with only one hole. At that time, all the fruit was in season: grapes, figs, and cantaloupes. They didn’t go hungry or thirsty while in Sicily!”

Hillman was wounded in Normandy on June 17, 1944 with shrapnel in his spine. “Many thanks to Joe Piacenta and Doctor Bob Franco for perhaps saving my life. In Holland, landing on those giant sugar beets on September 17, 1944, I broke my left leg and right ankle.

“The best of times was when all those alive came back to camp. The worst of times was when roll call was made and so many of our comrades were not present to answer, “Here, sir.”

Also Hillman felt that the worst of times was spent in the Bulge, struggling through the snow, over very rough terrain, “Especially with unhealed injuries from Holland. But I made it.”

HARRY BUFFONE

An amusing account from Harry Buffone tells how he captured 200 Italian prisoners in Sicily. “If they had wanted to fight we would have been in big trouble, because they were in a fortress, with high walls with jagged rocks. We managed to get inside and I ran into the commander. Because I could speak and understand a little Italian, I told him he was surrounded and we were going to kill every Dago we saw. He then put both arms around me and
kissed me on my cheeks and said, “Where have you been? We have been waiting for you two weeks to surrender.”
Lt Dean McCandless in headquarters company, 1st Battalion, offers an insight into the leadership of the battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Gorham. It’s the view and account by a lieutenant who served under a commander who always demanded the best. General James Gavin, then regimental commander said, “Most of the combat success of the regiment in Sicily was due to Art and the men of his command.”

McCandless came upon an enemy outpost after jumping into Sicily on the night of July 9, 1943. About to throw grenades, he and his group realized they might hit some of their own troopers, so bypassed them and moved to the top of a small mountain. There in the morning, dug in behind a hedge beside a road, they saw the invasion fleet several miles east in the bay, a beautiful sight.

“Midday several German tanks came clanking up our road and stopped just opposite us.” McCandless raised his head a little to take a look at the German tank commander as he looked across toward the invasion fleet -- “thank God, he never looked down and they soon clanked onward, then we saw an enemy patrol of six or eight soldiers was headed directly toward us. We got ready. Ott had a 45 cal. ‘Tommy gun’ while I had a carbine and a 45 pistol. We agreed that when the patrol was close and in full view, Ott would start shooting from the right and I’d start shooting from the left and we’d work toward the middle.” The patrol came closer, McCandless expecting them to crest the hill at any moment but, “They never did — It seemed like hours before the patrol was gone.”

It was near the break of day when McCandless nearly tripped over a gun muzzle extending out from some shrubs.
Jumping past it, he shoved the muzzle of his carbine into the chest of a drowsy out-post soldier, who shouted, “God almighty, don’t shoot! “His southern drawl was music to our ears with the stress and tension of two nights and a day suddenly vanishing.”

The infantry commander told McCandless of other paratroopers nearby. McCandless soon found headquarters company expecting to hear, “Where the hell have you been?” from Colonel Gorham. Instead he was greeted “like a long lost son!”

That evening Gorham asked McCandless if he could establish an outpost. Pleased to be asked, McCandless assured him that he’d been in the infantry much longer than in communications. Setting up an outpost with a bazooka team and a machine gun squad a hundred yards or so on their right flank, they took turns keeping watch throughout the night.

At dawn, Col. Gorham decided to reconnoiter the forward areas and recalled McCandless from the outpost. He asked McCandless, Lieutenant Comstock (assistant battalion surgeon), Corporal Higgins and Private Williams to join him. “We were climbing a small hill when all of a sudden there was a lot of shooting to our front and right. A few paces later we could see over the crest of the hill that there was a German Tiger tank in the valley to our right, some two hundred yards away.” They hit the ground, with everyone shooting at the tank that had become disabled.

Col. Gorham motioned to keep down while he crept ahead. He was either on the crest of the hill or a bit on the forward side when he knelt and raised a bazooka. “Within seconds there was a tremendous explosion and Gorham was down. Lieutenant Comstock jumped up to his side. There was a second tremendous explosion and Comstock was down. I then ran to them; luckily the Tiger tank did not fire at us again.” Col. Gorham was dead; the battalion commander had a large triangular hole in the center of his
forehead. “Comstock had a terrible long gash obliquely across his face so that his nose and lips were lying to one side of his face but he was alive but in great distress. I asked Higgins to go get a Jeep in a hurry even if he had to steal it.” In the meantime McCandless gave Comstock a morphine shot, even though he tried to protest through his shattered face. “In a very short time Higgins was back with a Jeep. I never asked where he got it. We all loaded Comstock onto the jeep and rushed him back to the hospital on the beach. Higgins and Williams then returned with the Jeep and recovered Col. Gorham’s body.”

“Why Col. Gorham took the chances he took we’ll never know. I’d never seen him fire a bazooka and he did not fire it that day - we were well out of bazooka range at any rate.” McCandless said that Gorham was a brave and aggressive leader and was sure that he would have become a general with General Gavin.

“Lieutenant Colonel Gorham took command of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment when it was activated during the summer of 1942. During the Sicilian campaign he received two Distinguished Service Crosses and a Purple Heart for his bravery in actions around Gela.”
Mark Alexander  
Battalion Commander and  
Regimental Executive Officer  
505th Parachute Infantry Regiment

Major General James Gavin, the previous commander of the 505th Parachute Regiment, said of the abilities of Colonel Mark Alexander, “He is a superior troop leader in combat — possessed with exceptional courage and performs brilliantly on the battlefield.”

His combat experience in Sicily and Italy made Alexander probably one of the most seasoned (if not the most seasoned) U.S. Army combat officers in the ETO by D-day and certainly one of the four or five most capable airborne officers. Everybody else was cutting his baby teeth on combat command. No wonder they needed him so badly over in the 508th when the regiment lost its executive officer.

After the war I came to know Alexander when we served together on the board of directors of the Regimental Combat Team Association. My wife and I enjoyed a lunch together with the Alexanders and afterwards Mark presented me with one of his excellent oil paintings. It’s fascinating that someone who “performs brilliantly on the battlefield” with its violence and death, was also so creative and artistic.

To The Men and Women of D-Day
Went the day well?  
We died and never knew.  
But, well or ill,  
Freedom we died for you.  
Anon

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The fifth day, thirty-four days after making his combat jump on D-day, Mark Alexander regained consciousness on a hospital cot. He drifted in and out, taking in bits of information – the smell of canvas and rubbing alcohol, the pressure on his chest and back, his disorientation and tubing in about all his orifices. He felt someone holding his hand, not sure who— then heard a voice and General Ridgway had his fingers tight around Alexander’s fingers. Talk about respect. Alexander and Ridgway talked, not much, and Alexander drifted off and let the last 34 days and events unfold in his mind.

Always expressing optimism about survival, Alexander commented when hit with a mortar shell fragment, “The Germans lucked out.”

During the depression Alexander needed money for college, so after reading in a local newspaper about a hiring for a crew on a banana boat to South America, he rode the rails to New Orleans. Arriving at the port, he discovered that they were no longer hiring. He stayed on working as a stevedore in New Orleans learning the hard way to survive on the waterfront.

Finally in college doing post-graduate work, Alexander was intent on becoming a professor. However the head of the ROTC program at the college persuaded him to try for a commission as the possibility of war loomed. Alexander joined the National Guard. Successfully passing the exam, he earned a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant. When the unit was inducted into the Regular Army, Alexander, not satisfied with the state and quality of the training, volunteered for the airborne.

During the first days of the Normandy campaign, Major Alexander was the regimental executive officer of the 505th. After the loss of the commander and the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, Alexander, realizing the gravity of the situation, voluntarily took command of that battalion as executive officer.
While marshaled at the airfield preparing for the D-day invasion, General Ridgway asked Alexander to select a plane and a jumpmaster for the jump in Normandy. There had been a general feeling that Ridgway would go in by glider with the division staff. However there wasn’t any experience factor for glider landings at night in combat. With the high number of glider casualties that occurred in Sicily, also the British prediction of high losses, the decision was made by Ridgeway to go in by parachute. The troop carrier command assured him they would provide the best crew and plane to insure his jump was successful. The 505th was chosen because of its combat experience.

Alexander had a lot to deal with — if he screwed up and Ridgeway drowned in a flooded causeway or got shot by a Waffen SS private, it wouldn’t be pretty. Alexander checked with Captain Talton “Woody” Long, regimental headquarters company commander, who recommended an experienced jumpmaster, Lieutenant Dean Garber. They were to jump from a plane on the right side of the flight formation where the jumpmaster could best see the pathfinders’ beckoning lights on the ground below. Ridgway’s plane was in the last serial consisting of thirty-six aircraft, however regimental headquarters company was added for a total of 45 aircraft. The stick was small with a total of 11 - normally 20. Garber, realizing the responsibility of putting the division commander on the ground at the right spot, nevertheless was confident that it would be a good drop. As it turned out, Ridgeway landed alone and wandered until the regimental S-2, Lieutenant Doerfler crossed his path. Alexander must have been chewing nails wondering where Ridgeway ended up.

The 82nd Division was comprised of about 6400 men from the 505th, 507th and the 508th with the destination drop zone “O” between Ste Mere Eglise and the Merderet River. The 505th was to capture Ste Mere Eglise and secure the two bridges over the Merderet River, one at La Fiere and one at Chef-du-Pont. The pathfinders marked
the drop zone with Ts of green lights and Eurekas (homing devices) to guide the aircraft in. However there were casualties with troopers misdropped, falling in the marshes and some in Ste Mere Eglise.

The plan worked out well with General Ridgway making a “perfect” landing on the correct drop zone while Alexander landed about 200 feet from a small house and barn. Rounding up jumpers, Alexander moved out in column toward Ste. Mere Eglise ready to do battle in a war that many would not survive. Thus began the first of his thirty-four days in Normandy, June 1944. “I floated in on a parachute and went out thirty four days later on a stretcher, the victim of an exploding shell, a piece of which I still carry in my lung.”

About 60 or 70 glider pilots from the early morning flight had collected near the command post of the division headquarters. With a return trip not included, unlike the pilots of the C-47s. “I went to General Ridgway near the division command post and asked if I could have the glider pilots for his perimeter defense, and he readily approved.”

Reports to the command post indicated that the 2nd and 3rd battalions were being attacked at St. Mere Eglise, and that the 2nd battalion was under attack along the main road from Cherbourg. In the meantime the 1st battalion, defending the bridge at La Fiere was engaged in an intense firefight with German infantry who were supported by Renault tanks.

During a lull in the shelling, Major Kellam, the battalion commander, and the battalion S-3, Capt. Roysdon, were killed when Kellam, moving out in an open field, decided to retrieve some equipment bundles he had spotted. Then it was learned that the 1st battalion executive officer, Major McGinity also had been killed late in the morning.
It was vital that La Fiere and the bridge at Cauquigny, critical junctures over the Merderet causeway and Chef du Pont, were seized and held for the incoming invasion forces.

In the absence of the regimental commanding officer, Alexander decided to go to La Fiere so that he could personally determine the gravity of the situation. On the way to La Fiere he found a group of about forty 101st Airborne Division, and 508th Parachute men lying in a ditch along the road. “I rounded them up and took them with me to La Fiere. I scouted the position and found that most of A Company with Capt. Red Dolan were well organized and in a good situation on the right side of the road facing the Merderet River and bridge.” Alexander approved Capt. Dolan’s plan to move his company back 150 yards from the intense mortar and machine fire along the riverbank. Later Dolan wrote that he had admired and respected Alexander’s coolness under fire and his ability to lead in combat.

“On the left of the road was a mixed group of C. Company, 505th men occupying a house (manor), and some 507th men under the command of, I believe, a Capt. Rae on the ridge above the manor. On the bridge sat a disabled Renault tank from earlier fighting. The whole position was receiving heavy fire from the west bank around Cauquigny.” Alexander spotted two German tanks screened behind the buildings in the village of Cauquigny across the river. “I had located one of our 57mm anti-tank guns, abandoned in a defilade position about 75 yards above the bridge and on the left side of the road. There were two holes through the shield apparently from an earlier duel with the Renault tanks and there was no gun sight. There were six rounds of armor piercing ammunition, so I put Elmo Bell and two other men on the gun. I told them that if there was another tank attack, to bore sight the gun and when they were out of ammunition to abandon it.”
Alexander headed back to the railroad junction near the dirt road just as Gen. Gavin came in from Chef du Pont. Pleased with the progress at La Fiere, Gavin told Alexander to take command of that position. "He instructed me to stay where we were on the east or near side of the bridge and to hold fast not allowing passage to the Germans. At that time he was more concerned about the situation at Chef du Pont.

Alexander found an A Company man with a dollar-sized piece of his skull blown off and still alive. "We gave him a shot of morphine but judged it would be better to come back for him after dark with a stretcher. That medic Kelly was a real good man."

Gen. Ridgway wrote to Alexander in May 1972 that the taking of Cauquigny by the 325th regiment on June 9th, 1944 was, "the hottest single incident I experienced in all my combat service both in Europe and later in Korea."

Alexander said that at about 2100 the night of June 10th, the supply officer for the 2nd Battalion and his driver came down the road with a jeep load of ammunition. "The jeep hit a mine in the road and I saw them blown up in the air about fifteen feet. I ran over to them. The driver had been killed and Lieutenant Donnelly was in bad shape and could not see. One of the lieutenants and I carried him into the command post, gave him a shot of morphine and tried to comfort him. Although he could not see, he asked, ‘Is that you, Col. Alexander?’ I assured him it was and that we would soon have him back with the medics and I thought he would be OK."

Alexander was still in command of the 1st Battalion with Col. Walter Winton taking his place as executive officer of the 505th regiment. On June 15th the 1st and 2nd Battalion launched an attack to the west — objective St. Sauveur La Vicomte.
“In leading off, the 1st Battalion had to pass through elements of the 9th Division on our right. It was a green regiment that was bogged down in a hedgerow and was getting shot to pieces by German mortar fire. Our experienced battalion drove the Germans back, and as I once said, we passed through the 9th like a dose of salts, and at the end of the day, we had progressed about halfway to the Douve River north of Crosville, where we sat down for the night.”

That night there was only sporadic resistance mainly from a stonewalled farmhouse and buildings. There were a few casualties including Lieutenant Gerald Johnson who had suffered a round through his shoulder and a new 1st lieutenant replacement was shot through the knee.

On the 16th of June an attack at dawn met stiff resistance from an 88-gun position, but by 1400 hours they had reached the road paralleling the Douve River. “We had no more than taken up our defense than a German command car with four occupants drove right into us from the north along the river road. Our men shot them to pieces. I don’t know how it happened but a German artillery major survived the incident.”

Shortly thereafter Alexander spotted German tanks on a road junction about three quarters of a mile to the northeast on the river road. “I had my artillery observer bring down a concentration of fire. When the smoke cleared, the tanks had gone and I saw no further German action in that area.”

The lack of firing in the 2nd Battalion area led Alexander to believe that they had also reached the river. Leaving a platoon-sized roadblock on the river road, he gathered the battalion and started them moving southwest on the river road to where the main road crossed the Douve River. “I went ahead with my orderly and a radio operator. When I arrived at the bridge I met Col Ekman and General Ridgway.”
The last of the 2nd Battalion had just crossed the half-blown bridge when Ekman ordered Alexander to bring up the 1st Bn. “I told him they were already on their way and the lead elements began arriving as I spoke. I directed them to speed up the crossing behind the 2nd Bn.”

Ridgway informed Alexander that he had 15 batteries of artillery to back him in the establishment of the bridgehead. “My 1st Battalion crossed the bridge unopposed immediately behind the 2nd Battalion. We took up a position on the high ground in the northeast part of St. Sauveur La Vicomte and the 2nd Battalion was positioned straight ahead. Then with the 508th in the southwest part of the town, a very firm bridgehead had been established.”

Late on the 16th, Alexander set up his command post in one of the farmhouses. “One of the battalion headquarters men came to me and said he was going to cook a suckling duck dinner with potatoes and tomatoes from the garden. Later my staff and I sat down at a kitchen table, prepared to eat our first hot meal in ten days.

“The field telephone rang. It was a call from Colonel Ekman. He said that General Ridgway wanted me to report as executive officer of the 508th Regiment as soon as possible, that they needed me there. In a few minutes, the telephone rang again and General Ridgway himself confirmed the order. I said to Ridgway that I was a 505th man. And he said ‘you were.’ So I jumped into a jeep, left my suckling duck dinner to Major Bill Hagen, my replacement, and reported to Colonel Lindquist, the commander of the 508 as his new executive officer.” Alexander said that he received a rather cold reception as the senior officers of the 508th had been together for about one and a half years and, “I was an outsider.”

In the defensive period from June 18th to the morning of July 3rd, not a great deal happened. Alexander had Colonel Lindquist’s approval to frequently check out the regiment’s defensive positions. Most of the time he would
take his orderly, Virgil McGuire, with him, but about half the time he went alone.

“One evening I was restless. We were in a wooded area straddling a dirt road, which ran into the enemy’s positions. I decided to check some of our positions, one in particular that protruded into the German position. I quietly moved down the dirt road through the trees. All at once I realized I was hearing German voices on both sides of me. Very quietly, I turned around and sneaked back to where I had come from. I finally located our roadblock. Both men were asleep, but not for long.”

Another night Alexander had been out checking the battalion when it started to rain. He returned to the area where his orderly McGuire had procured a pup tent and two blankets, and dug a slit trench as they had been receiving occasional mortar fire. “There was mud in the bottom of the trench, so I moved into a pup tent with my two blankets and was soon sound asleep. I awakened to the sound of nearby explosions. With the next flash and explosion, I could see four holes in the top of the pup tent. Yes, I got up and took my two blankets and moved into the muddy slit trench.”

On the morning of July 3rd, the 82nd jumped off to take La Haye Du Puits with Alexander giving the attack order for the 508th. It went well until Lieutenant Colonel Shanley, leading the 2nd Battalion was severely wounded. The loss of Shanley was critical, leaving an inexperienced captain in command. Alexander requested and received permission from Col Lindquist to take over and immediately went forward. After sending Shanley back to the medics, he proceeded to get the battalion reorganized and was successful in leading it to its objective.

Following a visual recon on Hill 95 for the attack next day, he returned to the battalion C.P. Reporting to Col Lindquist, “I had no more than hung the phone back on the tree than the Germans lucked out. They put a round
of 81mm mortar into the top of the tree. I think I heard it coming but took a dive — too late! I was hit in the back by two shell fragments. It felt like someone had stuck a fence post in my back.”

Dr. Montgomery and the medics taped his chest tight, closing the wound so that Alexander would not have a blowhole and collapsed lung. When he arrived at the field hospital, he put his foot down to dismount from the jeep and can only remember falling to the ground.

“When I came to after surgery, Major General Ridgway was sitting on a stool by my cot holding my hand. He was talking to me but I do not remember what he said as I was only semi-conscious. The next time I awakened Father Connelly was bending over me praying. When I came to again the nurse came to me, looked at my dog tags and said “Your dog tags only say you are a Christian but you are a Catholic now for Father Connelly just gave you the last rites.” Alexander remembers his stay in the field hospital, “I was hooked up with tubing in just about all my orifices until the fifth day at which time, thirty-four days after floating into Normandy on a parachute in the dark of night, I was put on a stretcher and carried by ambulance to a British hospital ship which crossed the channel to Portsmouth, England.”

He rejoined the 82nd in Nijmegen but because he was not fully recovered from his wound, proceeded to Suippes, France as camp commander, awaiting the return of the division. Alexander remained there until January 20, 1945. Still not recovered from the lung wound, he returned to the States for duty at the Parachute School, Fort Benning. Discharged from active duty in November 1945, he had developed a malignant tumor, thus ending his military service. Source: 1, 15
A MATTER OF PRIDE

Award Ceremony

Gen. Eisenhower (walking) In background King George and entourage
Attributes Of A Leader

When I joined the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment as a green 2nd lieutenant two weeks before the division sailed for North Africa, I was struck by the quality of leadership of both the officers and non-commissioned officers in the regiment. Professional and well trained, they led by example, expecting the same from each individual. The officers mentioned below had a stamp of leadership that established the standard for the regiment and division.

Brig Gen Matthew Ridgeway

As one of the first of its kind, along with the 101st Airborne Division, the 82nd was designated as an airborne division. Brig. Gen. Bradley and Brig. Gen. Matthew Ridgeway provided the initial leadership, training and administration that would make the division one of the finest in the Army. When Bradley was reassigned, Ridgeway was promoted to Major General, taking over as division commander.

Lt Col James M. Gavin

With the activation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Lt Col James M. Gavin was assigned as the regimental commander. The young West Pointer, admired and respected by his officers and non-commissioned officers, became a legend in the span of two years.

Gavin insisted on providing a skilled and aggressive body of men who could fight as a combat team as well as individually. There would be no misfits. As “Ready”, the history of the 505th points out, “A daily run of at least four to five miles and a weekly march of 20 to 30 miles assured this. The rule was if you fall out, you ship out, and there were seldom second chances.”
Lt Col William E. Ekman

“Gavin liked him, partly because he had modeled himself on his chief. He was calm, bright ... moved everywhere in training, and seemed tireless physically ... he did pull the regiment together, but did it fairly and sensibly. Ultimately, he performed well in combat and won the respect of the 505th and Gavin.”  

Source: 19

The Ten Most Underrated Commanders

Matthew Ridgway is listed as one of the ten most underrated commanders in military history. Others listed in this category are: Aetius, Saladin, Suleiman I, Maurice of Nassau, George Washington, Charles Cornwallis, George Thomas, Ferdinand Foch, and K.K. Rokossovsky.

“Few American generals have matched Ridgway’s combination of battlefield leadership and strategic grasp. He was both a fighting general whose battlefield presence won confidence of his men, and a brilliant strategic thinker who trusted his own judgment.”  

Source: 20

Commanding General

82nd Airborne Division,

August 1942 to September 1944.

Matthew Ridgway, the son of Colonel Thomas Ridgway, an artillery officer, was born in Virginia on 3 March 1895. He attended the West Point Military Academy and graduated in 1917 (56/139) and was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in the US Army.

General George Marshall was impressed with Ridgway and took him to Brazil on a special assignment. Soon after the outbreak of the Second World War he was sent to the War Plans Division in Washington.
In the spring of 1943 Ridgway helped to plan the airborne operation that was part of the invasion of Sicily that began on 10 July 1943.

This was the first time in history that the U.S. Army had used paratroopers in battle. Ridgeway was also responsible for planning the airborne operation during the D-day landings on 6 June 1944. This time Ridgeway jumped with his troops. The 82nd fought for 33 days, advancing to St-Sauveur le Vicomte.

In September 1944, Ridgway took command of the 18th Airborne Corps. He led his troops during the invasion of the Rhineland and Ardennes-Alsace and on 2nd May his troops joined up with the Red Army on the Baltic. On 4 June 1945 he was promoted to lieutenant general.

After the war Ridgway was Commander in Chief of the Caribbean Command (1948-49) before becoming chief of staff to General Joe L. Collins. In 1950 he was given command of the 8th Army in Korea. He launched the counter-offensive on 25 January 1951 and when General Douglas MacArthur was recalled in April he was promoted to full general and became Commander in Chief of the Far East Command.

Ridgway replaced General Dwight D. Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe on 30 May 1952. His decision to surround himself with his American personal staff upset other European military leaders and he was brought back to the United States in July 1953 to replace General Collins as chief of staff of the United States Army. Matthew Ridgway died in March 1993. Source: 6
Lieutenant General James M. Gavin

Regimental Commander,
505th Parachute Infantry Regiment
6 July 1942 – 10 October 1943

Assistant Division Commander,
Brigadier General
9 December 1943 – 26 August 1944

Commanding General,
Major General, 18 October 1944
82nd Airborne Division, 27 August 1944

“Lt.Gen Gavin beat the odds many times in his life, initially by rising from poverty and obscurity to attend and flourish at West Point. He cheated death in hundreds of training jumps (many with experimental parachutes), in four combat parachute jumps, and in numerous battles. In combat, he always jumped first from the lead aircraft. On the ground, he led his troops from the front. As a result, he was noticed by his superiors and quickly rose through the ranks, becoming the youngest major general since George Armstrong Custer. After military retirement, his success continued as the United States ambassador to France and later chairman of the board of a major corporation (Arthur D. Little).”

In the Life of James Gavin, the biography starts with the sketchy details of James Gavin’s birth and ancestry. “He was the son of an unwed Irish immigrant. He was placed in a New York City orphanage at the age of one or two. Gavin had a lifelong obsession to discover his heritage. Unfortunately, he was largely unsuccessful. Martin and Mary Gavin, a Pennsylvania coal-mining family, eventually adopted him. His youth taught him the discipline and hard work that would pay dividends throughout his life. Gavin had no idea what he wanted to do in life, but he was quite
positive that he did not want to labor in the Pennsylvania coalmines. He escaped the coalmines by enlisting in the U.S. Army at age 17. Showing promise, he was selected for admittance to West Point. The period between the wars was characterized by a small, outdated, and stagnant military employing the weapons and doctrine of World War I. During this interwar period, Gavin devoted himself to becoming a student of the great captains of history - Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoléon, Robert E. Lee, and Thomas J. ("Stonewall") Jackson. He championed the concept of mobility in warfare and saw the advent of airpower as a way of adding mobility to the battlefield. It was natural that Gavin would be attracted to the concept of airborne warfare.”

The highlight of the book is the well-documented description of Gavin’s wartime accomplishments. It provides an engrossing chronological account of Gavin’s battlefield leadership, drawing from sources such as interviews conducted with Gavin shortly before his death in 1990, his wartime diary, and official 82d Airborne Division after-action reports. A study of Gavin in combat provides the student of military history timeless lessons in battlefield leadership. Gavin led with his M1 Garand rifle in hand, never far from the action. He was critical of other leaders for losing touch with the combat environment and not knowing the conditions experienced by the line soldier.

Sources: Text from 6, 19

Brigadier General William E. Ekman
Regimental Commander
Lt Col 22 - March 1944
Colonel 22 - July 1944 - EOW (end of war)

Lt. Gen. John Norton (company commander, regimental operations officer, and as the division’s operations officer
on Major General Gavin’s staff) commenting on William E. Ekman, “We can’t overlook the trooper who took us through our heaviest combat in Normandy, Holland, the Bulge and on in to Germany for a big part of our history.”

**Bob Piper**, a regimental staff officer (S-1 and S-2) wrote:

“Let me tell you a few things about Bill Ekman that perhaps you didn’t know.

“Bill came from a relatively poor family in St. Louis; his father had been a strong man in a circus; he wanted to go to West Point and he got there by enlisting in the Army, going to West Point Prep School and through competitive exams, receiving an appointment to “The Point.”

“Lt. Bill Ekman was an airborne officer in 1941; long before many who called themselves “old airborne” were even in the Army.

“In 1942, when the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment was activated at Camp Blanding, Florida the CO, Colonel Lindquist, grabbed Bill Ekman as his “right hand man” (regimental executive officer) for he knew that he had been an outstanding staff officer, was motivated, dedicated and could do any job the 508th needed.

“For these same reasons, in March 1994, General Ridge- way, on General Gavin’s recommendations, seeing that the 505th needed a strong regimental commander, chose Bill Ekman, by then a lieutenant colonel, to take command.

“He wasted no time in telling the assembled regiment, his commanders and his staff who he was, what he wanted, what the rules were and how he planned to make the 505th the best fighting unit in the Army.

“Bill pushed himself and his staff 16-18 hours a day and soon knew more about the regiment than anyone else.”
From Ralph H. Mann who served as Assistant Sergeant Major in the 508th prior to Ekman’s transfer to the 505th:

“Having read the article in the Static Line about Bill E. Ekman in the 505th, I would like to tell you of my attachment to him in the 508th where he was executive officer.

“I went to Jump School in June of ‘43 and came back to the regiment as assistant sergeant major and occasionally acted as Col. Ekman’s runner. He never showed signs of being tired, as I was. When we came to the end of a problem we had to dig in. My job was to dig two holes — Col. Ekman’s and mine. While I dug he disappeared. When he came back he brought me a watermelon. He didn’t have to do it, but he cared for his men.

“In the Tennessee maneuvers you walked, rain or shine. We were marching down the road when Col. Lindquist came riding up in a jeep. He stopped and said (I don’t remember the exact words but something like this): ‘Bill, can’t we get this column moving faster?’ Col. Ekman replied, ‘If you would get out of that jeep and walk with your men you would see why we’re not going faster.’ Col. Lindquist took off in his jeep.”

“When we moved out of Berlin, Col Ekman gave the sergeant major and myself a command car to travel to France. I don’t know how he got back but he sent us back in style. This he did not have to do either. He was a remarkable man — a man I’d follow anywhere. It was an honor to serve him. I left the 505th to go home on another ship.”

Ernie Massei, at a regimental headquarters’ company mini-reunion in Tulsa, told about an incident that occurred during the Battle of the Bulge. German soldiers were infiltrating our lines and Col Ekman had grabbed sergeant major Massei and a jeep, telling him to drive so they could make a quick check of the 505th positions. Barreling down the snowy road, they were stopped by a large Military
Policeman standing in the center of the road, who held his hand up.

Col Ekman and Massei explained the urgency of their trip, but were not allowed to pass. Both tried a second time — still no results. Finally Massei turned to Col Ekman and asked, “What should we do?” Without turning his head, or raising his voice, Col. Ekman said, “Run over him.” The M.P. managed to quickly step out of the way.

**From Edward Boyle** who served in Headquarters’ Company, 2nd Battalion, 505th from 1946-1948.

“Your column in the *Static Line* brought back memories of Col Ekman. I was his radio operator (SCR 300) in 1947. He could still out-walk most of us 18 and 19 olds. Boy, he could really cover ground. It took two or three radiomen to keep up. He could have stayed in his office — the war was over!

“According to one old 505er, Col. Ekman may have gotten off to a bad start in his first talk. He is supposed to have said, ‘It is good to be here with the 508th.’

“Once a year, since 1990, when I retired, Frank Juliano from the 101st and I have been having an airborne day at West Point on the June 6, D-day anniversary. We attend a service held at the grave of Gen Gavin.

“I was telling my wife Ann, who goes with me, that no mention is ever made of Col Ekman, even though he is buried in the same cemetery. Odd! -- Thanks for your efforts.”

Another one of our fine 505th regimental surgeons, **Gen Dave Thomas**, writes:

“Interesting that you should write about Bill Ekman. I knew Bill from ’41 but really got acquainted when I joined the 508th after breaking my leg in the 505th and missing the boat to Africa.”
“Bill was our exec and a hell of a good one. He was a by-the-numbers and by-the-book officer who always let everything be out front and in the open.

“Herb Batchelor took over when Jimmy Gavin moved up to ADC (assistant division commander) but Herb didn’t hack it, so we got him in the 508th and Bill took over in the 505th. You couldn’t have gotten a better man and he was stepping into a hard act to follow. As you acknowledged, he did a great job.

“I don’t know what the odds are for such a thing happening, but the first trooper I met after landing in Normandy was Bill Ekman. We were somewhere around La Fiere and could see the 3rd Battalion, 505th descending on St Mere Eglise. Bill said, ‘Come with me Dave.’ Said I, ‘I’d sure like to, but I’m due at Chef du Pont.’ That was my first mistake. Bill made it, while I ended up captured, escaping, and making it back to our lines, using the North Star for reference and traveling at night!

“Bill retired as a brigadier general in St. Petersburg. Jeanne and I visited Iris and Bill a couple of times. Unfortunately, many years ago, Bill died of leukemia.

“His son, Mike, had an outstanding airborne career and is now retired as a colonel. Hang in there!”
The regimental organization was based upon the table of organization, dated 1/08/44, and referred to as the triangular concept. The strength of the organization changed during the war, increasing in personnel, equipment and weapons. The regiment had a total of 1968 personnel with 102 officers, 7 warrant officers, 511 NCOs and 1348 privates. There were three battalions, a medical detachment and a chaplain’s section. Each battalion with a total of 582 personnel, had three rifle companies, each composed of 130 personnel. A battalion was equipped with 8 light machine guns, 4 - 81mm mortars and 7 bazookas.

The rifle company had 12 light machine guns, 3 - 60 mm mortars and 4 bazookas. Additional firepower was furnished to the regiment by its supporting units. Separate tank or artillery units were attached to support a specific mission during the campaign.
SUPPORTING UNITS

Company B, 307th Airborne Engineers

Engineers are troops who specialize in using physical obstacles to slow down the enemy, removing similar obstacles that stand in the path of friendly units, and the ancient art of attacking and defending fortresses. As the skills and attitudes necessary for these tasks are essentially the same as those possessed by inventors, engineers have often proved far more innovative than their comrades in the infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Indeed, many of the weapons, devices, and techniques used by other branches of the service were either first employed by combat engineer units or, at the very least, designed by military engineers.

The sappers, pioneers, pontooniers, and miners were replaced with a single type of combat engineer, a soldier who was able to fell a tree, set an explosive charge, drain a marsh, or build a bridge with equal facility.

The role of the airborne combat engineer was especially valuable during World War II. They not only participated in the combat jumps, but upon landing behind enemy lines, the airborne engineers often ended up fighting as infantry, plugging in the lines where there was a most critical need. They were, however, never awarded the Combat Infantry Badge (therefore no combat pay).

On August 15th, 1942 the battalion was redesignated the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion as part of the 82nd Airborne Division. After leaving the States on the U.S.S. Monterey on April 29, 1943, the men never saw the full
battalion again until going to North Ireland in December 1943.

The 307th consisted of three companies: battalion medical company, two companies of engineers B & C and later a third company. The company organization chart called for 130 people, the basic arms were the same as infantry - the M1 Garand rifle, the BAR (Browning automatic rifle) and the bazooka - there was no heavy equipment.

During the combat jump in Sicily, the 505th and 307th Company B were scattered in their drop on July 10 1943. A group of engineers from Company B acting as infantry were plugged into the line during the battle of Biazza Ridge on July 11th. The rest of the engineers were misdropped deep behind German lines. Most of the men landed near Santa Croce, south of Vittoria. They lost one officer and two EM at Biazza Ridge but their names were not included in the memorial there.

B Company jumped with the 505th at Salerno, prepared demolitions for defense and repaired bridges on the way to Naples. In Naples, they cleaned up the post office after it was blown up and later lost about half of Company B on October 19 when their own building, the Prince of Piedmont Artillery barracks, blew up, killing 15.

Going into Normandy in 1944, the 1st and 2nd Platoons jumped with the 2nd Battalion of the 507, not with the 505th.

In the first days after the jump in Holland, the 307th asked permission to mine the railroad track that ran near the division command post. They were told no; later the infamous German train came right through in the middle of the night. Apparently it didn’t stop until reaching its own lines. (This incident always proved to be an interesting subject for discussion and it remains to conjecture as to how many German soldiers and how much equipment got through successfully).
The company jumped and fought with the 505th from Sicily to Berlin, except for a brief time in Normandy. The battalion is still part of the 82nd Airborne.

The 307th Airborne Engineers had the distinction of being designated as the first airborne engineers, participating in eight campaigns. Over 400 men passed through B Company with over 273 casualties and 36 dead. The high number of their casualties was due to fighting as infantry. Sources: Text from 6, 20, and 21

**456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion**

The 456th Battalion was formed 24 September 1942 and assigned to the 82nd Airborne 10 Feb 1943. It consisted of a headquarters and service battery with three batteries, each battery with four 75mm howitzers and 100-130 men.

A major problem for the new airborne artillery was to select a weapon and learn how to transport it. Many senior officers thought they should be equipped with heavy mortars, others preferred the 75mm pack howitzer. The debate continued into North Africa before the 75mm pack howitzer became the clear selection.

The pack howitzer had been used in the Philippines in 1898-1901 and was renowned for use in rugged terrain. The transport was originally by mule. The bare 75mm pack howitzer weighed 1300 lbs., or 9 mule loads. When the necessary peripherals were added it was 1600 lbs. Every mule had its own service record and serial number. It was reported that at one mule’s retirement after 20 years’ service, the battalion paraded past it in the reviewing stand for a special ceremony.

The 456th Battalion was involved in five battles and utilized five different types of transportation: Into Sicily by parachute; Normandy by LST plus a few landing from
the air at 4:03 am; Holland by glider (the battalion senior staff parachuted); the Bulge by truck and Central Europe by box car.

Fifty-one members of the battalion lost their lives during the European campaign, according to records compiled by Star Jorgensen whose father, Arthur Frenck, was a member of headquarters and service battery. Sources: 6, 22

**80th Airborne Anti Aircraft Battalion**

We were always glad to see the 80th Airborne Anti Aircraft Battalion. That unit followed the 82nd through all of our campaigns.

The battalion joined the 82nd Airborne at Ft. Bragg. Personnel in the battalion were not volunteers as compared to those in the two parachute regiments, the 504th and 505th. As “anti aircraft” they wore the braid of the Coast Artillery, but primarily became “anti-tank” after Africa. For the rest of our campaigns they underwent glider training.

The battalion had about 70 to 100 men and consisted of six batteries with eight guns for each battery. Initially their weapons were 40 mm used as anti aircraft, then as 37 mm for anti tank. The battalion converted to a 57 mm (as shown) in North Africa with a 2.28 shell known as the “six pounder.” While their biggest gun was no match for the German 88mm, they were a welcome addition.

For the Normandy invasion, the 80th arrived in fifty-six gliders, carrying twenty-four 57mm guns, twenty-eight jeeps and nine 1/4-ton trailers at 4:03 am. Three batteries came ashore on the beachhead.

Arriving in St Mere Elise, the 2nd battalion came upon two of the 57 mm anti tank guns complete with crews from the 80th. The battalion commander decided to place one
to cover a road block on the northern end of town and later, another to support a platoon along the road, a short distance to the north.

Prior to the invasion, intelligence had identified German armor within the division’s area. General Ridgway, wanting to be sure that the 505th got all its guns, assigned a lieutenant colonel in division headquarters to the task of insuring successful delivery. The officer later described his harrowing ride across the channel, ending in a crashed landing in a hedgerow, “Those guys don’t get enough money,” he said.

During the Battle of the Bulge, three batteries entering Belgium first, took up defensive positions near Werbomont. A lone gun from a battery with four men was left behind to cover movements of the 505th, 2nd Battalion. Overrun, the four men were killed. Lieutenant Wertich and Corporal Taylor received the DSC.

While men of the 80th had not joined as volunteers and were not parachute qualified, they became airborne, and were proud to be part of the 82nd.

All told, the 80th lost 64 dead. Division records show five unaccounted for. Source: 21

The 307th Airborne Medical Company
Headquarters Company, 82nd Airborne Division

The 307th formed in August 1942 with 17 officers and 157 enlisted men, served as the medical resource for division headquarters and operated as a division hospital under combat conditions. The company was composed mostly of glider men but also had a number of parachutists who made jumps with the parachute regiments.

In 1943 the 307th made its first combat jump into Sicily where they set up a medical clearing station. For eleven
days the 307th clearing station was the only American medical service available. Source 21

The 307th participated in “Operation Overlord,” jumping and landing by glider in Normandy, it treated over 4000 casualties. Jumping in Holland, they set up a clearing station in an open field near Grosbeek. Four medical teams worked around the clock to maintain medical service during a ten-day period.

Then during the “Battle of the Bulge,” the 307th established a clearing station in Belgium and later moved it to Cologne, Germany.

The 307th earned six combat streamers for their service in World War II. Sources: 6, 24

ORGANIZATIONAL NOTES

Company B of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, and the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion were permanently attached to the 505th with their members often serving as combat infantrymen.

The 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion, and the 307th Medical Co. supported the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment intermittently in one or more of its six campaigns. They also supported the other regiments of, or attached to, the 82nd Airborne Division.

Every mission assigned to the team was accomplished, even when the overall strategic result was deemed inconclusive. All can take pride in having contributed to justify the inscription on the Gavin Monument in Groesbeek, Holland—”Mission Accomplished.”

Most of the men entered combat within fifteen months after entering the service. Many were in combat within one
year. Most returned to civilian life afterwards. These were truly citizen soldiers.

**SIGNIFICANT EVENTS**

Colonel Gavin pioneered the regimental combat team concept. The regiment made the first mass regimental practice jump, Lugoff, SC 1943.

Of the six regiments participating in the Normandy invasion, the 505th was the only airborne regiment with combat experience.

The 505th fulfilled all of its missions in Holland, including control of the south end of the Nijmegen Bridge.

Participated in six campaigns, 1943-1945.

Made four combat jumps.

Earned three invasion Arrowheads.

**Unit Awards:**

Presidential Unit Citation, with cluster.

Distinguished Unit Badge.

French Fourragere.

Dutch Military Order of Wilhelm.

Belgian Fourragere.

*Source: 17*
GOING HOME!

How the Advanced Service Rating Score Worked

This rating was a scoring system that awarded points to a soldier for the purpose of determining who went home first. At the end of the war in Germany and Italy, a total of 85 points were required for a soldier to be allowed to return to the States. Otherwise, if you had less than 85 points, you could expect to continue to serve in the Army and most likely be sent to fight the Japanese. When the Japanese surrendered, the point system may still have been used to determine who was sent home and who remained as occupation.

After the Japanese surrender and the end of the war, the soldiers were sent home with their units. Some soldiers might have been transferred to another unit either because their experience was needed elsewhere or they had not been in the Army long enough.

From the view of the combat soldier the problem with the ASR Score is that it rewarded the rear echelon troops who had been overseas a long time even though they had never seen combat. Many supply troops had served 2 or 3 years overseas. However, it was unusual for a combat infantryman to survive that long.

The Advanced Service Rating Score

Points were awarded for the following:
+1 -- Point for each month of service.  
   (Between 16 September 1940 - 12 May 1945).
+1 -- Point for each month overseas.  
   (Between 16 September 1940 – 12 May 1945).
+5 -- Points for first and each award received.
+5 -- Campaign stars worn on theater ribbon.
+12 -- Points for each child (less than 18 years) - up to a limit of three children.

Source: 6
Here’s How It Worked For the Author

ASR = 37 + 24 + 30 = 91 with enough points to go home!

With 91 points, I was transferred from the 82nd Airborne Division to the 17th Airborne Division for the voyage home. Those in the 17th with fewer points were transferred to the 82nd for occupation in Berlin.

As the 505th history relates, “On June 21st the parting ceremony took place. About 1000 veterans were leaving the 505th and they formed into one group, while those staying formed in another. Then Colonel Ekman and his staff led those staying in review past the veterans, and the veterans in turn marched in review past the remaining regiment. Even the most callous could not help but feel a surge of emotion as the veterans marched by, as it was not only goodbye, but also the end of an epic. After nearly 30 months overseas, spent on two continents, involving six campaigns, and seven river crossings, the remnants of one of the greatest fighting units ever assembled were on their way back home.”

On the same day, June 21st, I, with the high pointers, was transferred to the 507th (17th Airborne Division) at Rambervillers, France. I spent nearly two months there awaiting transportation back to the United States. In the last part of August, we traveled to Marseille in southern France and a few days later boarded the U.S.S. Mariposa, the sister ship that carried us overseas. In the early part of September the Mariposa pulled into Boston Harbor where a huge sign on the breakwater said, “Welcome Home, Well done.” After processing at Camp Miles Standish, the troop trains carried us to the various discharge centers.

“The division, including the regiment went on to Berlin as an occupation force, and there gained the distinction and title of ‘America’s Guard of Honor.’ On the 19th of November, it was relieved from that duty and eventually made its way to the United States, arriving in New York
harbor on January 3, 1946. On January 12th, with the 505th included, the division was an integral part of the ‘Victory Parade’ up New York’s Fifth Avenue, and thereafter moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where the division and regiment are still active.”

And serving our country.

“We who are left, how shall we look again
Happily on the sun or feel the rain
Without remembering how they who went
Ungrudgingly, and spent
Their all for us, loved too the sun
and rain?

...How shall we turn to little things
And listen to the birds and winds
and streams
Made holy by their dreams.
Nor feel the heart - break
in the heart of things ?”

from Lament by Wilfrid Gibson

Source : 6
I would like to thank and express my appreciation to the following members of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment who were kind enough to provide accounts and memories of their service during World War II:

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A MATTER OF PRIDE

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4 - Ryan, Cornelius, A Bridge Too Far, Simon and Schuster, 1974 (one-time permission for non-commercial use).

5 - Mrozek, Steven J., 82nd Airborne Division, Taylor Publishing, 1987 (permission to reprint).

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32 - Into the Valley by Charles Young.

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34 - Partial text and photo of General Clay from Wikipedia.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Chicago, Illinois I attended Northwestern Military Academy, graduating in 1938. A student at Iowa State University, I was called to active duty in 1942 as a 2nd Lieutenant in the infantry with World War II under way.

Volunteering for the airborne, I became a paratrooper serving in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division.

After the war, I married Betty Stephenson in Riverside, California, briefly working for her father Lawrence Stephenson, the editor and owner of a weekly newspaper in Arlington, California. Both Julie and John were born in Riverside.

Recalled to active duty, I served in Korea twice as well as Panama before retiring from the service in 1967.

Working for corporate headquarters of a bank in downtown Los Angeles and then moving to Encinitas, California in 1975, Betty and I finally settled in La Jolla, California.