EIGHTY SECOND AIRBORNE DIVISION

D DAY

SEPTEMBER 17TH

WITH THE 82ND AIRBORNE
by parachute

By David H. Whittier With 82nd.

PARATROOPS IN HOLLAND. — In bright sunlight today from a clear blue sky thousands of red, white, blue, green and camouflaged parachutes settled into the Dutch countryside as American paratroops descended and secured their immediate objectives in the path of a retreating German army.

Veteran American paratroopers who ate a combined breakfast-dinner of sausage, cereal, French toast, tomato juice, coffee and fried chicken in England, three hours later were drinking milk and munching hard-boiled eggs in Holland proffered by an overjoyed civilian populace.

Sitting packed in rolling, pitching C-47s, bodies constricted within a mass of cumbersome equipment, the paratroopers roared over England's undulating countryside and fought off the nausea of air sickness accentuated by an irrepressible excitement.

The jumpmaster of our ship, hovered around the open door in a manner that didn't ease the turbulence in my stomach. Always a sufferer from acrophobia, my insides writhed as I watched him moving around half in and half out of the door with nothing more than gravity and a sense of balance holding him to the floor of the ship.

After about an hour we came over the Dutch coast, part of the area flooded by the Germans, and now only distinguishable from the sea by scattered red rooftops and strips of high ground. A Flying Fort lumbered along on our right looking very powerful and protective as the sun glinted along its sleek silvery fusilage. Fighters would occasionally slip into view as they weaved above us.

Speeding inland, we became possessed of mixed feelings—below us Dutch people stood by their little red houses in their green fields and waved handkerchiefs to us; around us black puffs of ack ack blossomed in the sky. One plane ahead began disgorging paratroopers. A moment after the last man jumped, the ship swerved and plunged to the ground where it burst into a ball of orange flame and black smoke. We gulped and then watched three fighters go into a perpendicular dive over what was apparently an anti-aircraft position.

The crew chief of our plane, a fellow who divided his time between sleeping on the floor and rearranging the buckets interspersed at regular intervals along the length of the plane for the purpose of catching what some men couldn't hold, began hurriedly to don his flak suit. The flak suit ressembled a baseball catcher's chest protector except that it covered part of the back as well as the front. „What about your behind?" or words to that effect shouted a witty private, veteran of the Sicilian and Italian invasions.

„Oh, that—the air corps says it's expendable," bellowed the air chief.

The man who sat opposite me had been reading WESTERN MAGAZINE all the way. How he could sit there calmly immersed in a pulp magazine at a time like that, I'll never know. Most of us were half sick, terribly uncomfortable and scared. Our mission was a tough one—the objectives had to be taken at all costs and from advance intelligence reports the objectives would be exceedingly well defended. There was plenty to be anxious about. There always is in this sort of an operation and we were sweating.

Then we arrived over the river. It looked much bigger than it had on the map and it seemed to wind all over the countryside. We'd get the order to „Stand up and hook up" any second now. I thought about my Mae West buried someplace under my equipment. I'd never be able to get at it if we landed in the river—with this equipment on I'd sink like a stone. I tried not to think about anything and grabbed my rifle tighter and waited.

„Stand up and hook up," shouted the jumpmaster. We struggled to our feet, snapped our static lines to the anchor line that ran along the reef of the ship, grabbed our weapons still more tightly and waited.

Our ship was a C-53, which is exactly the same as a C-47 except that it is not equipped to carry cargo and therefore has a much smaller exit door. I'm over six feet and, as we stood under the anchor line, I worried about getting out of the door. Is it not easy for a man six feet two inches tall to jump through a door four and one half feet by two and one half feet wide under any circumstances. When he is leaded down with a pistol, rifle, bandoliers of ammunition, a pack, a bed roll, a dispatch case, gas mask, Mae West, two parachutes and sundry other minor items—brother, he's got something on, and a C-53 door looks like a chink of daylight.

The „Jumpy" shouted „Go." Immediately, all thoughts of Germans, flak, upset stomach, rivers and C-53 doors flitted from my mind. I was number fourteen man and I could see the rear ends of the men in front of me as they turned into the door. I could hear the prop blast catch each chute and „plop" it.

There was a great rush of air and a tremendous "wham" as my chute burst open. All the world seemed suddenly quiet — as in a dream. There was still the roar of engines, but it sounded far away. I got a glimpse of vari-colored chutes around me and on the ground I could see more chutes of all colors; the red ones looking like puddles of blood.

I slung my rifle over my arm and reached up to grasp the risers in order to slip into a plowed field where I could see other paratroopers running around, but I couldn't make it as the wind was too strong and blew me into a strip of trees bordering the field. I crossed my arms in front of my face, crossed my legs and crashed through the trees to the ground.

A fellow rushed up and started to help me out of my harness. „Where are we?" I asked.

„In a turnip patch," he said.

„I thought we were in Holland," I replied strickenly. That's how excited I was.

WITH THE 82ND AIRBORNE
by glider

COMING IN WITH A GLIDE AND A GULP....

By Wm. F. Dawson.

On the 17th, we were ready to go. This was it. The weather was perfect and, unlike our proposed Belgium landing, the British 2nd Army was not moving too fast to make our operation feasible.

The gliders were stacked up end-to-end on the cement runways, and along side of them on the grass were the big C-47 Dakota—two planes modeled after our Douglas airliners. Some of the C-47's had been on four parachute hops and all were huge grizzled veterans compared to the tiny CG-4a American gliders that make but one trip (if you're lucky). Tension was not great as we piled our stuff aboard the glider. Our pilot had been in on Normandy and again in Southern France. He was cool, and inspired confidence through his capabilities.

On the front of the glider, already named „Betty" by the pilot's friends, went Bette Oswald's picture, the first pin-up to go into an invasion guiding a glider of fourteen men. What a destiny for a snapshot!

Then the moment came! Amid the deafening roar of the huge twin-motored transports, we saw the grass curl backward and lie flat from the prop blast as the plane and glider team in front of us took off down the runway.

„Hook your safety belts, the Nylon tow line is fastened, they're taking up the slack . . . hold on!" Then with a lurch the tail comes up, the nose goes down, the plywood creeks, and we are barreling down the runway. Long before the tow plane leaves the ground the speed sends the flimsy glider skyward. Then the C-47 comes up under us and we're off for the rendezvous area. Gliders ride higher than their tow planes, and we can see the sky full of planes and gliders, including our own tow plane below us, roaring out to get into our respective position in the four column line.

First, over the English countryside with its tiny checker box fields, and then out toward blitz Creek (The North Sea.) Some of us would never see England again. We all had a lot of thinking to do. A thousand times we'd been over the plan of what to do, when, and where. Would this be a milk-run, a suicide, or neither? Once the initial take-off and thinking spell were over, we settled back for a 275 mile, three hour journey. Some combat veterans actually went to sleep, while others read, thought, prayed and watched the scenery. I just got sick. After the first fifteen minutes, I had already been sick for thirteen. Flashing my hash was but a momentary pleasure among the agonizing minutes between flashes. Seventeen times I tried to throw up the lining of my gizzard and sixteen times it said, „NO, I like it here!" But enough of the pains and displeasures of one airsick rookie.

Out over the North Sea we could see a steady stream of traffic all around us and an occasional Corvette cutting the water below. Thunderbolt fighters would flash momentarily in the sun above us while groups of six C-47's, without their glider cargo, would flash paratroopers by as they caught up and crossed our path at an angle from some other English field. To our left and above a stream of British Horsar (Flying Boxcar) gliders with their Lancaster bomber tow planes. This was „it," the biggest air show on earth . . . from the air.

„Wow!" said one of our Ohio soldiers, „what Cleveland wouldn't give for this air show." Below us were the shadows of the huge planes and gliders on the water which in itself appeared a sparkling contour map of blues and light greens, where the bottom waxed alternately shallow [illegible] distinct but irregular patterns.

On and on they went, streams of gliders joining in a roaring current from the smaller flow out of several English airdromes. Huge, four-engined Forts, their silver bodies and high tails shining, would cross overhead on their way to pulverize Germany. And always the pursuit fires, Thunderbolts, and Mustangs, so small yet so deadly, darting under, over, criss-crossing through the otherwise helpless air convoy they were protecting.

Occasionally a glider or a tow plane struck by flak or mechanical difficulties would be seen in the sea. I spotted two Horsars, one C-47, and one American CG-4a, which is a remarkably small percentage when you consider we were in on the greatest air invasion to date. On the wing of the American glider stood two lone figures. „Were the others drowned or was it a cargo glider with only two aboard?" That we found out later. No lives lost. One of those two tiny specks on the glider wing in blitz creek returned to us on a later and more successful flight.

As we roar over „flak island," that big mass of land in the Zuider Zee, the smoke puffs that denote ack-ack start to rise, but always the fighter planes harassing their accuracy. One burning C-47 is seen crashed in a field, but the chutes on the ground indicate all the paratroopers and crew had bailed out in time.

Most of Zeeland had been flooded in an earlier attempt by our Air Corps to bomb the dikes and keep the Germans bottled up. On one high spot stood a Dutch house, three trees and a glider which had made a perfect forced landing on the only available ground.

As we made our air trek inland, the flak grew heavier and the land grew drier. In between watching flak bursts, we could see the Dutch people in their Sunday goin' ta meetin' clothes out in the streets of their villages and hamlets waving us on joyously with both arms. For them, after 5 years, it must have been a truely astonishing and inspiring sight. Soon we saw some of the parachute planes coming back on the sky road to England. They gave us the „W.C. Fields" nose light greeting and sped onward in their closer and speedier formation. For them, it was the last lap of a run well won, for us, a reassurance for the tense climax ahead.

Continued Pag. 4

D + ONE *looking up*

GELDERLAND GLIDERLAND.

It was D plus 1. Much of the artillery, many smaller units, and a complete re-supply by air were to be the attractions. Unlike all previous airborne invasions, this one had to be complete. No artillery piece, no matter how heavy, no re-supply no matter how essential, could be brought by sea; the 82nd airborne formed an inaccessible pocket of resistance far from any allied sea or land supply.

It was a beautiful autumn day and visibility was perfect. When they started to come in, hundreds of Dutchmen, like myself, were standing along-side their houses, looking skyward at the spectacle. I tried to imagine the thrill it must be for these liberated people.

Hundreds of gliders coming in with their tow planes, a stream that funneled out of the horizon widening with each mile nearer the eye. The pilots had been trained to cut loose at 800 feet, but in a lift so large, they had to come in at all altitudes to facilitate a speedy surprise and still avoid collision. Cutting loose at various altitudes, the gliders would turn left at a hundred different angles while the Dakota tow planes turned up and away to the right, tightening their formation and quickening their speed for the dash home.

There it was, a cloudless sky covered in heighth and depth with gliders, cutting loose, soaring, turning, diving, and landing. All in a continuous moving panorama.

Landing, that tense moment when you either make it or you don't, and then .... what will greet you when you leap from the soreplane? Some land on grass, others in a cloud of dust on freshly plowed fields .... some come straight at a tree, a house, or a hill. Will they clear it? Some don't, but most of them do, somehow lifting suddenly, almost miraculously and then pointing down for a landing.

What kind of a landing, I asked myself, as the men in each glider must have been asking? ... There were many .... Some nosed down to grind to a hairpin stop in a small area, others glided along a grassy pasture stirring up a little puff of dust, a divit of turf and then coming to an easy stop .... Elsewhere the fields were plowed and a cloud of dust and dirt would clear to alleviate the suspense of the onlooker with a perfect landing. Others, not so lucky, might hit a truck, garden or a sugar beet field that appeared green from the air and then suddenly loomed up as a loosely plowed, uneven, rough spot, a sudden rise or depression in the ground, or two trees not quite far enough apart .... Many nose over in a cloud of flying dirt and their heavy jeep, trailer, or artillery piece tears loose in the crash to plow through the side of the flimsy gliders. One glider comes in at a 45° angle scraping the tip of one wing until it catches and turns the plane and its cargo in a somersault of twisted wreckage. The fusilage is twisted like a bar rag being rung out, after a spilled fish bowl schooner .... cases of artillery ammunition are strewn over the ground for twenty yards in the furrow the glider had cut.

Yet, when we fought our way through the choking dust cloud which engulfed the twisted wreckage, only the pilot of the dazed crew was slightly hurt and the grimey-faced occupants were carrying him to an approaching aid man.

A few crashes tore the heavy jeeps and 105's loose to seriously hurt the less fortunate, but by and all the fortunes of war had been good. The skill and luck of most landings were exceptional. The largest mass glider landing in history was a huge success. Fields for miles around were covered with the flimsy motorless CG4a's. A Dutchman would look out the window of his little house one minute to see planes overhead and return a minute later to find a glider sprawled in his turnip patch.

RESUPPLY BY BOMBER.

Then came the bombers. Re-supply by air. Huge four motored Liberators loaded with supplies instead of block busters.

At tree-top level, the silver giants with the multi-colored names and mascots painted on their sides leisurely buzzed the men below as they confidently roared past. These flying arsenals feared not the scarce and scattered ack-ack which the Paratroopers had been „working-over" from the ground for twenty-four hours. Colored nylon chutes—blue, orange, and white—float down with the much-needed food and ammunition bundles tied on. Colapsing on the ground like huge mushrooms in technicolor, these parachutes, along with those of the day before and the abundance of gliders, [illegible] the fields that two days before housed a cow, a horse, or a pig, now too bewildered to leave the sanctity of their barn.

Still further above the gliders, tow, planes, and bombers, darted the always present fighters. Silver streaks, the greyhound watch-dogs of the sky, keeping the Luftwaffe at a safe distance. A glittering stary umbrella, a milky-way of protection, a mile above the gliders.

Light flashes, puffs of smoke and the boom-boom of German ack-ack in the distance, all added a touch of realism to the serenity of the scene. Much of the tension felt in the air the day before was lost when watching from the safety on the ground. The huge over-all panorama of a thousand things, the over-all coordination of this stupendous air show almost obscured the tense realism of the job being done by the sky armada we were watching.

One Lib. limped over with only three motors „conking on all fours" as a grim reminder that all was not peace and quiet. „Jerry" artillery booming throughout the landings found the range toward the end, and blasted a few gliders in the field before their crews could unload them. The artillery lost appoximately one third of their tow jeeps.

Two C-47's conked out from flak and went down in flames over Germany, when one group of planes misjudged the landing zone and took their gliders east of the Reichwald. Most of these men fought their way back during the next three days, but such a grim accident and terrible crashes are a part of every airborne operation. We all know and realize it. They are to be reckoned with and prevented if possible, but in an operation which was so close to perfection there is no place for criticism of a few unavoidable errors. Many crashed in Germany, most returned safely, but by and all the operation was perfection in performance and the landings were picturebook in their excellence.

The new Airborne Army can well be proud of the skill, co-operation and co-ordination which so successfully pulled off this largest of all airborne operations in history. Landing casualties were light. Efficiency, planning, and surprise were terrific. The largest operation to date was a tremendous success.