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...As Normandy Invaded By Allies

finished him off."

A Close Call — "Right outside Carentan, I rolled up in a raincoat and just started to relax when I heard my buddy's M1 roar right over my head. A Kraut, knife in hand, slumped dead right on top of me."

Sergeant First Class William J. Chaplic, then private first class of Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, remembers:

"When you hit the ground, race for the town hall of St. Mere Eglise. When you get to the mayor's office and open the door you'll see me sitting there and this American flag flying over the town."

Challenge Issued

Bill Chaplic recalls his old commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Edward "Cannonball" Krause, throwing this challenge to him and other members of his battalion just before the big Normandy drop.

Chaplic was supposed to serve as Col. Krause's bodyguard. In reality he had a hard time just keeping up with the "old man."

Wounded six times in the Normandy campaign, "Cannonball" once remarked to Chaplic, "I am just not combat happy anymore. Some of those guys out there are trying to kill me."

At St. Mere Eglise, recalls the graying but tough Chaplic, "Initial resistance was nil. Some of the Krauts had to be wakened to be informed that they had had the 'snitzel'. . .but it got worse. But when it was too rough for everybody else it was just right for us."

That last sentence, Chaplic insists, was the motto the airborne troopers of the 505th lived by. "Guys went AWOL from the hospital to jump with their units into Normandy. They were a great bunch, the likes of which we won't see again."

Colonel David E. Thomas, then a major with Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, remembers:

"Some good soldiers caught me in the moonlight and that was all she wrote. I was a prisoner."

Utilizing his professional skills, the enemy employed the experienced surgeon in one of their forward aid stations, guarded by a capable looking type with a submachine gun.

"Eventually, I just got up and walked away. Only traveling when I could see the stars and holing up in the daytime, I tried to make it to friendly troops . . . One bad day I spent in a ditch with a German at each end. But I finally made it to an American artillery unit after three days as a prisoner."

Of the enemy Thomas reminisces, "The German rear area was in turmoil. If the Krauts got on the roads they were very likely to get 'zapped.' We had troopers all over. As for the German resistance, it was good as far as I was concerned because I spent most of the time surrounded."

Looking back with a faint smile the colonel said, "At Normandy it was simply a matter of rounding up a bunch of guys and going to war."

'Straight Ahead'

Later in the Normandy battles, the colonel recollects a private remarking after a particularly fierce struggle for a ridgeline, "You know its great to be in an Airborne unit because you don't have to look right or left, just straight ahead. You know the trooper on each side will be there."

Added Col. Thomas, "The German was afraid of the airborne. An aggressive, offensive spirit is what did it. The American paratrooper of World War II did not think defensively. For this reason he kicked hell out of the enemy every time."

At one point in the battle for Normandy the major became separated from his group during a night march. The unarmed surgeon soon noticed the approach of an enemy soldier. Lying in a ditch full of dead Americans, he feigned death. When the German kicked his foot, "It was the longest second of my life," relates the colonel. The ruse worked and once more Thomas escaped capture.

Sgt. First Class (Ret.) Bill "Red" Delany, then private in Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, remembers:

"Coming down, the enemy fire made me think of the Fourth of July in Atlantic City. I don't know how any of us made it. Once on the ground confusion was the only word that could describe it."

Of the first French city to be liberated, "Red" recalls, "St. Mere Eglise was three days of cognac, K rations and Germans."

Dug in, in the graveyard of a small French church in St. Mere Eglise, "Red" and Fox Company held out against repeated German counterattacks.

Delany comments, "The Germans were tough. They used those 88s like huge sniper rifles. The boys used to sing, "Those 88s are breaking up that old gang of mine!"

"Red" recollects one common rejoiner of the period, "We got it made! How could the German intelligence find out what we are doing when our own G-2 doesn't know."

Bayonet Practice

Morale was high, but it wasn't all laughs — far from it. "American paratroopers were hung from trees and used for bayonet practice."

The worst for "Red" was when he sat huddled that first night outside St. Mere Eglise and watched helplessly as other "paratroopers caught by tricky winds drifted uncontrollably into the burning buildings of the town." A few days later "Red" helped bury them.

Nineteen men out of 140 in Fox Company were still on their feet when they were finally relieved 33 days later.

Lt. Colonel (Ret.) Adolph "Bud" F. Warnecke, then a sergeant with B Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, remembers:

"We were in the air for seconds but it seemed like an eternity. The whole ground came up at us. I mean everything! The sky was full of tracers."

Warnecke crashed into an apple tree and for him this marked the beginning of the battle of Normandy.

"We dropped about midnight. By 5 a.m. we had 80 out of 135 together and moved out to our first objective, a causeway between Etienville and St. Mere Eglise.

It was dog eat dog. After clearing a houseful of Germans at the head of the causeway, we were hit by armor. We hit the river and crawled along the riverbank with nothing above the water but our heads, till we went around a bend out of sight of the German Mark Vs."

Later, "two 57mm antitank guns brought in by the 325th Glider Regiment knocked out both of those tanks in no time at all."

Strictly On Attack

In the days that followed: "We went strictly on the attack, taking the high ground and clearing out strongpoints of Germans. But it was the 3rd or 4th of July that I remember as the bloodiest day of the war for the 508th. We were fighting from hedgerow to hedgerow. We had to take these objectives one way or another and the only way was head on. We lost a lot of people."

Warnecke also remembers the Navy at Normandy. "Fire support was something else. Those 16 inchers of the U. S. S. Nevada and the Texas made the most gruesome noise when they went over your head. It was like a freight train rolling through the sky."

Struck by a burst of machine-gun fire in the battle for the hedgerows, Warnecke went on to fight in Holland and Germany.

Of the paratroopers he reminisced, "We were trained so well that there was no doubt in my mind at the time that we couldn't do the job. Later I learned many allied commanders thought we couldn't. We proved them wrong."

Decisive Battle

Normandy ranks with Stalingrad and El Alamain as one of the decisive battles of modern times.

D-Day alone cost the Allies 7,000 dead. Paratroopers accounted for a tragically high proportion of casualties during the assault.

The survivors of the air-drop of June 6, 1944, marched on to participate in the air invasion of Holland, help throw back the savage Nazi counterattack during the Battle of the Bulge and ultimately cross the Rhine River and destroy the last vestiges of German resistance.

To these five men, Normandy remains the accomplishment of their lives — those few hours, twenty-four years ago, they were a small part of the "Great Crusade."



hit the silk" in this dramatic photo of action during turned the tide of World War II in Europe.



NOW AS CIVILIANS—"We lost a lot of people," reflects Lt. Col. (Ret.) Adolph (Bud) Warnecke, left, now residing in Fayetteville. At right is retired Sergeant First Class William (Red) Delaney, who recalls St. Mere Eglise as "three days of cognac, K rations and Germans. He is a civilian worker at Ft. Bragg.

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