



315th Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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AND
 a reminder to send in your Registration form.

READERS ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO SUBMIT MATERIAL FOR THE NEWSLETTER. PLEASE ADDRESS ALL SUBMISSIONS TO THE UNDERSIGNED:

Edward M. Papp, Editor
 315th Newsletter
 200 Bryant Avenue
 Glen Ellyn IL 60137

Our September 1996 gathering in Milwaukee is but a few weeks away. We look forward to meeting you there, so send that Registration and hotel reservation form now (before you forget again.)

- *Tours are optional (the Saturday tour complimentary for the ladies.
- *Average high temperatures in early September are said to be in the upper 60s to low 70s; average lows in 50s.
- *Member Ken Ehlenbach has arranged for reduced rates in the hotel's adjacent parking garage, to include the expected three or four RVs which will park in an outdoor area. To receive proper identification (the authority for reduced rates), members utilizing the garage should so advise while registering.
- *Your arrival packet will include a name label which you will affix --at a Saturday afternoon time to be announced -- designating your banquet table preference. You may want to make arrangements with friends to share a table (seating for eight). Welcome a single or first-timer to your group.

See you in Milwaukee

J. S. Smith

To those of us who served in the USAAF during WWII, a book like *The Conquest of the Reich* by Robin Neillands offers an insight into how it was to fight the enemy on the ground. The author has compiled accounts of land battles from the men who fought in them to give the reader a unique and unforgettable picture of the land war. We reproduce below Chapter 8 The Rhine Crossings 7-24 March 1945 from the book which was first published in the U.S. by New York University Press in 1995 This chapter will interest all our readers who took part in the "Varsity" mission. Your editor is indebted to H.B.Lyon who sent the material with the thought that our readers might find the chapter of special interest. How right he was!

8 The Rhine Crossings

7-24 MARCH 1945

By the end of February 1945, with most of the Western armies on the Rhine and Patton forging towards it up the Moselle valley, Nazi Germany was clearly in *extremis*. With the last natural defence line on the Rhine now threatened, desperate measures were necessary to defend the remnants of the Reich and even schoolboys were recruited into the ranks of the *Volksturm*. One of these was Fred Rhambo.

'In 1945 I was fifteen years old, living in Hamburg and a member of the *Hitler jugend* - the Hitler Youth - as we all were. We stayed in the *Hitler jugend* until we were seventeen, doing a certain amount of military training. Then we were called up for the Wehrmacht, half-trained to be soldiers.

'My father had been a prisoner-of-war of the British in 1916 and he was a real pessimist about a German victory, especially after America entered the war ... that was, for him, the end.

'We boys were called up in February 1945 and sent to a training camp, a former concentration camp at Wedel. Our uniforms were old ones - a friend of mine had a tunic with five patched bullet holes in it. I was a Nazi then - and I am one of the few who will admit it today - but life in the Hitler Youth was fun and a challenge. We were young - what did we know?

'We trained with hand-grenades and the *panzerfaust*, and I was a squad leader. How we didn't blow ourselves up I will never know. One of my squad mates, Gerhard Ullner, had a 500 lb. British bomb split open in his backyard. We would take some of the explosive to school and use it to burn our

initials into the desks. The American bombers sometimes had records in them - gramophone records - and we would search the "shot-downs" for them. We liked American music - Swing - and some kids tried to dress like Americans, which the party hacks did not like at all.

'We got no news on the German radio. San Francisco could have burned down, they would not have told us. We all listened to the BBC under the bedclothes, though it was forbidden ... and those opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - Boom-Boom-Boom-BOOM - sometimes gave people away to the Gestapo.

'So, we trained and waited, and the bombers came over by day and night. Then we heard the guns. There was electricity for just three hours a day but the street-cars were still running, sporadically, and the submarine yards and machine tool factories were still working. I was a fifteen-year-old with twelve young kids under me, and we waited for the British tanks.'

General Bradley and the two Army commanders in 12th US Army Group, Generals Hodges and Patton, intended to cross the Rhine 'on the run' if they could, without pausing to regroup for a formal assault. Such a plan would have been greatly eased by the capture of a bridge, but as the Allied armies raced up to the Rhine, bridge after bridge was found in the river or blew up in their faces.

Field Marshal Montgomery, on the other hand, intended to group the three armies - 1st Canadian, 2nd British and 9th US - of 21st Army

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Group on the west bank, bring up all his available forces and make a massive setpiece crossing around Wesel with all the impetus necessary to continue the advance right across Germany. This advance from the Rhine, north and east across the North German plain, would take the Ruhr, Bremen, Hamburg - and Berlin.

The SHAEF plan was for Bradley's Army Group to play a supporting role in this major assault across the Rhine, by crossing south of the Ruhr, which would be encircled rather than assaulted. This had always been the plan, recently confirmed in Malta. General Patton resented it, feeling that his fast-moving forces should be supported and supplied for a rapid advance to the east through Frankfurt.

Some Americans, like John Price of Astoria, Oregon, do not share Patton's views. 'No one has ever asked me what I did in the war, as I was a noncombatant personnel adjutant of the 33rd Armoured (Tank) Regiment of the 3rd Armoured Division of the 1st Army. The 3rd Armoured Division was the spearhead division of the 1st Army, which was commanded by General Courtney Hodges. General Hodges has yielded all the headlines to General Patton, whose 3rd Army was in a secondary role. You will do a great service if you can correct the public's and media perception that General Patton won the war in Europe - and that if Patton had only been given the go-ahead and the gasoline he would have been in the heart of Berlin along with the spring flowers.'

Whatever Patton's wishes, at the end of February Eisenhower remained fully committed to the northern route. Then, on 7 March, the leading tanks of the 9th US Armoured Division, from Combat Command 'B' of General Hodges' 1st Army, reached a hill above the Rhine at Remagen and found the Ludendorff railway bridge across the river still intact.

The Germans had laid planks over the rail track and troops, trucks and horse-drawn supply wagons were now streaming east across the river. The officer responsible for the security - and if necessary the demolition - of the Remagen bridge had been a Captain Bratge. Bratge had under command a force of thirty-six infantrymen and some engineers commanded by Captain Friesenhahn, but on 6 March Bratge has been superseded by Major Hans Scheller from LXVII Corps HQ. All these officers were well

aware that they would pay with their lives if the Allies took the bridge intact.

A prisoner told the Americans that the Ludendorff bridge had been prepared for demolition and would be blown up at 4 p.m. that afternoon, and the American troops did not hesitate. In spite of hearing defending fire, the Americans rushed the bridge. The demolition charges duly exploded, but when the smoke cleared, the Ludendorff bridge was still standing. Thus encouraged, a group of American infantrymen and combat engineers swarmed across the span, cutting every wire, throwing any unexploded charges into the river. The first men across were Lieutenant Karl Zimmerman and Sergeant Alex Drabik from Company A, 27th Armoured Infantry Battalion, and more troops followed. By the next day General Hodges had 8,000 men from the 9th Armoured and the 78th Infantry Division in a bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine, covered by artillery and tank fire from the west bank of the river. The Americans were delighted and Hitler was furious.

The Führer had declared that no Rhine bridges were to fall into Allied hands. When he heard that the bridge at Remagen had been captured he had the officers tried for cowardice and treason by a 'flying court martial'. After a travesty of a trial, the officers who had not fled to the Americans were dragged from the court-room and shot.

The capture of the Remagen bridge was greeted with a barrage of praise from the American press and public, but it created a number of problems for General Eisenhower. Firstly, crossing the Rhine at Remagen was not in the current plan. Hodges' 1st US Army was supposed to turn south on reaching the west bank of the Rhine and link up with Patton's 3rd US Army further south. Secondly, the terrain east of Remagen was hilly and wooded and unsuitable for rapid exploitation.

General 'Pink' Bull, Eisenhower's operations officer at SHAEF, was at 1st Army HQ when the news from Remagen arrived, and told Bradley bluntly, 'You are not going anywhere down there,' but since Hodges had seized a bridge, Eisenhower could hardly order him to abandon it. Eisenhower was already committed to the major Rhine crossing by 21st Army Group around Wesel, but the rapid capture of Cologne gave him five spare divisions to reinforce the Remagen bridgehead. More divisions were therefore

rushed across the river into the Remagen bridgehead, which gradually began to expand.

Lieutenant Julian Van Buren of 9th Armoured Division remembers that time: 'We were to get to the Rhine and turn south, forming the north pincer of the envelopment and meet elements of the 3rd US Army coming up from the south. We were part of the 1st Army at the time, and along the way the forward elements came across the intact Remagen bridge, a railroad bridge with the ties covered with planks, making it passable to truck traffic. Because of some screw-up on the German side, they didn't blow it when our forward elements got there although it was charged with high explosives.

'On the east side of the river, the tracks went into a long tunnel through a solid rock mountain. Just a little to the north, closer to the river, there was the biggest wine cellar you could imagine. American GIs hauled wine out of there night and day, by the truckload. I took a truck up during the first days and got a load for our HQ. Lieutenant Hatoes and I drank a basket of it that night. It was the first time anyone ever drank Hatoes under the table, and boy! ... we were soused for days! It was Moselle wine, the same as champagne but without the bubbles.

'All roads to the bridge were one-way only. One could go east, but if you wanted to come back you would have to walk. In a very few days, engineer units had bridges across the river, so when the original bridge collapsed due to shell-fire, bombs and other things, it was really no problem for the bridgehead was already large and very secure. The 9th Division moved in a big hurry after that, becoming part of the south pincer round the Ruhr.'

Lieutenant Robert M. Brooker, of the 9th US Engineers, was attached to Combat Command 'B' on the drive from the Roer river to the Rhine. 'I was twenty-eight years old at the time, and I remember an officer of the 9th Engineers asking if I wanted to go across the Rhine river. Till this time I didn't even know that we had captured a bridge, so I went with him and we actually walked across.

'When I got back I told the two men in my jeep that I had been across the river and they did not believe me. In the morning we started for the bridge, but military police (MPs) were everywhere and we could no longer go that way. We had to go back a few miles, cut across country and come on the main road leading towards the bridge.

'When we reached the hill overlooking the Rhine, we could see the bridge still standing. We drove into town and found B Company of the 9th Engineers. We also found a basement to stay in, for artillery shells were falling all around, trying to hit the bridge, though this was almost impossible without a spotter to give directions.

'When the spotter planes came within range, our 90 mm gun radar would start the guns firing. Everybody would start firing over the bridge before the plane got there, and when the plane came into view it had already been hit. I don't remember how many planes came over but very few escaped. One bomb did hit the bridge but it failed to explode. The danger with everybody firing was that pieces of steel were flying all over. One medic would pull off his Red Cross brassard and start firing the 50-cal. machinegun. If the plane disappeared behind a building, he would keep firing right through the building, making pieces of brick fly dangerously close, so we went to the cellar - it was safer there.

'Nobody was in a rush to get on the bridge with all that shooting and bombing. We moved slowly but every once in a while had to dismount and take cover from all the flying bullets. We saw a shell land on the bridge near the eastern end, and just as we got near the hole in the bridge, another shell hit close the same spot. The fragments from this shell hit our jeep and wrecked it. It blew a big piece of the shell through the motor block and through Verna's head. It also wrecked our windshield except where I was. The pieces hit me on the shoulder, head and leg, but nothing too damaging.

'A small piece of the shell came through the windshield and went between my arm and body, and the concussion blew Peterson out of the jeep. When he came down the jeep was not there. Our bedrolls were damaged beyond repair. Peterson ran west to the bank and I ran east to the tunnel.

'When I got to the tunnel, an MP lieutenant asked me if I was sure that Vera was dead. I told him that I was. He then asked if I had checked to make sure. I told him "No." He then went out there in the midst of the shelling to see if I was right, came back and told me that I was. It took a lot of guts to go out there.

'I spent the night in the tunnel alongside Verna's body. During the night some Graves Registration people came to remove the bodies and

grabbed hold of me, but I assured them I was not dead. Since my jeep was wrecked, my driver killed, my sergeant gone, and I was in no condition to do anything, it was decided that I should go back to the other side of the river. I knew that I was going to spend the rest of my life on the east bank of the Rhine; I was *never* going back across that bridge.

'We found that Corporal Verna was being listed as "missing in action". I was afraid to go back across the bridge, but I went anyway, found the Graves Registration office and got the records changed. I did not want his wife to think that there was hope when there was none.'

The German reaction to the taking of the Remagen bridge was swift but inadequate. On 8 March Kesselring ordered a counter-attack against the Remagen bridgehead which went in on 12 March but failed to achieve any significant result. Attempts to destroy the bridge by floating mines down the river, by shell-fire, or bombing or V-1 rocket strikes, proved equally ineffective - though the explosions weakened an already shaky structure and on 17 March the Ludendorff bridge collapsed suddenly into the Rhine.

By then US army engineers had constructed other bridges into the 1st Army bridgehead, which was now twenty miles wide, eight miles deep and contained nine full divisions. The Remagen expansion continued as Field Marshal Montgomery prepared for his massive assault in the north, now set for 23 March 1945.

Hodges was not the only general anxious to get across the Rhine before Field Marshal Montgomery. General George Patton's 3rd US Army was now fighting its way up the Moselle to Koblenz and thrusting across the north of the Saar-Palatinate. The Saar was an industrial region, second only in importance to the Ruhr, and taking it would deliver a further devastating blow to the German war machine, but Patton lusted for the glory of a Rhine crossing. He had been beaten out of first place by Courtney Hodges but he fully intended to cross before Montgomery. Eisenhower insisted, however, that Patton must now turn south and overrun the Palatinate before crossing the Rhine.

The main effort to capture the Saar-Palatinate region, east of the Rhine, was made by General Devers' 6th US Army Group, and specifically by Patch's 7th Army, before Patton's forces took a hand.

There was an element of military politics in this, for Bradley and Patton wanted to get the 3rd Army involved in more fighting, if only to stop more 12th Army Group divisions following Simpson's 9th Army into the grasp of Montgomery's 21st Army Group. After three days the German resistance along the Moselle began to crumble, and by 19 March Koblenz on the Rhine had fallen to troops of the 87th Infantry Division.

'Meanwhile, on 15 March, Patch's 7th Army had launched a supporting attack on a seventy-mile front from Saarbrücken to the Rhine. Squeezed by pressure from two American armies, the German 1st Army front in the Palatinate gradually crumbled. By 22 March the Americans were in sight of the Rhine at Oppenheim, with Patton urging General Eddy of the XII Corps to push General Irwin's 5th Division across the river at all costs, just so long as his army got across here in the south before Montgomery got across in the north.

Irwin's troops duly reached the Rhine at Oppenheim, twelve miles south of Mainz, on 20 March. Two days later six battalions of the 5th Infantry Division crossed the Rhine in assault boats against light opposition, and by the evening of the 23rd, Patton had a bridgehead six miles wide and as many miles deep. A bridge was then thrown across the river and the rest of Patton's 3rd Army began to flow across the Rhine ... which Montgomery had still to cross. Patton's assault might have been much more costly, but most of the German defenders were now mustered around Wesel, waiting for Montgomery's attack.

War correspondents were coming up to see the Rhine crossings, some of them escorted by Haynes W. Dugan of the 3rd Armoured division. 'Things must have seemed pretty safe around 1st Army, for women reporters began to show up. There was Lee Carson of INS, who was very pretty and wrote well, but was often in trouble with the censor, and Iris Carpenter, an attractive British blonde who wrote for the *Boston Globe*. Among the correspondents was Jack Thompson of the *Chicago Tribune*, who had grown a magnificent chestnut-coloured beard. We nicknamed him "Mr Hemingway" because Ernest Hemingway was in France, winning the war with the FFI (French Forces of the Interior).

'Then Martha Gellhorn - the separated wife of Hemingway - showed up. I introduced her to the

correspondents and when I got to Jack Thompson I could not resist, "... and this is Mr Hemingway". Fortunately the Germans put a few shells in our area just then and that took her mind off the matter; I hid under a half-track while the 88 mms hit the corner of the building.

'Another correspondent was Peter Lawless of the London *Daily Telegraph*, whom we called "Peter the Lion". Peter was a huge man, formerly in the British Army but now over age, who wore large mittens connected by a string around his neck. He was immensely likeable but was killed in a shell blast at the Remagen bridge.'

With the Americans across the Rhine, Montgomery poised to attack the Ruhr, and the Russians already on the Oder, it was now clear - even to Adolf Hitler - that the armies coming from the east and west were going to crush his forces between their steel fists. Still rejecting any thoughts of surrender, on 19 March the Führer ordered a 'scorched earth' policy throughout Germany. When the Allies overran Germany, said the Führer, they would inherit a wasteland.

Everything was to be destroyed. Factories, hospitals, canal locks, roads and bridges, railway tracks, autobahns ... everything. This proposal appalled many of his generals and met with particular resistance from Hitler's Minister of Production, Albert Speer. Speer was the most intelligent of Hitler's acolytes and knew that if this destruction took place, it would immensely increase the inevitable sufferings of the German people. Speer therefore took to his car and toured both Eastern and Western Fronts, begging the German generals to ignore these orders. In spite of their Oaths of Loyalty to the Führer, most of the generals agreed to ignore any 'scorched earth' orders coming from Hitler's headquarters.

Speer made no secret of what he was doing. He told the Führer on three separate occasions that the war was lost, even when warned that such remarks could cost him his life. On 18 March he had sent the Führer a detailed memorandum, listing the collapse of Germany's military and industrial capacity: '... in four to eight weeks the final collapse of the German economy is certain', he wrote, '... after that the war cannot be continued.' Another man might have been shot, or handed to the SS for transfer to a concentration camp, but Hitler had an affection for

Speer. They were 'fellow artists', and on those grounds Speer was allowed his say, but ignored. Besides, there were now other worries: the British, Canadians and Americans were crossing the Rhine in force at Wesel.

Field Marshal Montgomery's crossing of the Rhine on 23 March 1945 was made in two phases: a river crossing, codenamed 'Plunder', and an airborne assault codenamed 'Varsity'. The combination was a typical, meticulous setpiece Montgomery battle, planned down to the last detail and put into effect with overwhelming force. For the 'Plunder' assault, Montgomery had the Canadian 1st and the British 2nd Armies, together with the American 9th Army; and for the 'Varsity' assault two parachute divisions, the American 17th Airborne under Major-General Miley, and the British 6th Airborne Division (of Normandy fame) under Major-General Bols. Such a carefully planned assault was necessary for the 21st Army Group had neither the advantage of surprise as at Remagen, or the hope of an unopposed crossing as enjoyed by Patton's troops at Oppenheim.

The Germans around Wesel were fully aware of the northern thrust to the Ruhr and ready for what was coming. The Rhine here was more than a quarter of a mile wide and the east bank was ably defended by five German infantry divisions in well-prepared positions. Beyond the Rhine lay the town of Wesel, a major communications centre. The British would land north of Wesel by boat, parachute and glider, and fight their way through the Diersfordterwald Woods to the village of Hamminkeln and the Issel river. This area was defended by the tough, experienced troops of the German 1st Parachute Army: the 2nd, 6th, 7th and 8th Parachute Divisions, the 84th Infantry Division and the XLVII Panzer Corps. The US 17th Airborne would land just south of the Diersfordter Wald and head south to link up with the 9th US Army and the British 1st Commando Brigade in Wesel.

South of Wesel, the 30th and 79th Divisions of Simpson's 9th US Army would spearhead the river crossing, opposed by the German 180th Division and troops from the LXXXVI Corps.

'Plunder' would be a night river-crossing, while the airborne assault was to be made in daylight, after the river had been traversed. The confusion of Normandy and the failure of the Arnhem landings had taught the airborne forces a useful lesson. This

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time both airborne divisions would land in daylight and in one lift.

Operation Plunder, 21st, Army Group's assault across the Rhine, began at 2100 hrs on the night of the 23rd. After a barrage from over 5,000 guns, the Black Watch and the Argylls (from the 51st (Highland) Division of Lt. General Sir Brian Horrock's XXX Corps) - supported by the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade - went across the river in "Buffalo" half-tracks. The Highlanders landed at Rees, ten miles north of Wesel, supported by D-D swimming tanks, under the covering fire of 3,500 guns. The Highland Division landed in the face of slight opposition, but were swiftly counterattacked by the German 8th Parachute Division, which held their ground at the village of Rees and cut off the Highlanders in the village of Speldrop.

Lieutenant Ian Wilson, with the Royal Engineers, takes up the story: "The assault across the river Rhine began at 0200 hrs on 24 March, and by 0500 hrs 3rd Platoon was on the west bank unloading equipment. Shortly afterwards I was afloat to mark out the lines on which to drop anchor. Mortar and shell fire on the bridge site made us feel very exposed. The rest of the platoon was building a floating platform to drop the anchor assemblies.

'Crafts of all sorts were crossing the river, including landing craft manned by sailors. Some of our anchor lines were cut by propellers, so more anchors had to be laid and part of my platoon was laying anchors after the bridge was completed - there must be a lot of metal at the bottom of the Rhine at Xanten. Ours was the first British tank bridge across the river Rhine. Our armour started crossing at 5.00 p.m. on 25 March, and Winston Churchill visited the bridge site on the following day.'

The Highlanders were followed across the Rhine by the men of the 1st Commando Brigade. The Commandos landed two miles north of Wesel and just after they swarmed ashore, Wesel was rocked by 1,000 tons of bombs dropped by aircraft of RAF Bomber Command.

Trevor Walmesly was flying with 105 Mosquito Squadron, Pathfinder Force during this period. 'On 23 March, my navigator, Ted Povey, and I were sitting in the ante-room of the mess when I spotted our CO, "Slim" Somerville coming through the door, obviously looking for someone. I nudged

Ted and said, "Slim's looking for volunteers; let's get out of here."

'Too late - down to briefing. We were seldom given the names of targets, and this briefing was very casual indeed. "You'll be marking for heavy bombers. Our troops are very close, so if there is any doubt about accuracy, don't drop." That was it, so we did the job and came home. The next day there was a signal on the notice board thanking Bomber Command for the attack on Wesel, stating that our troops had crossed the Rhine with minimum loss of life. It was signed "Montgomery".'

John Buckingham of 45 (Royal Marine) Commando, gives an account of his unit at the Rhine: "The units which made up 1st Commando Brigade were Nos 3 and 6 Army Commandos, and 45 and 46 (RM) Commandos. No. 3 Commando was the leading unit for the crossing, and Wesel the objective; 45's target was a factory at the eastern side of the town while the other three units occupied various parts of the town and secured a bridgehead for a pontoon bridge.

'We had studied maps and aerial photos until we were familiar with the terrain, our route and the objective. A few days before the assault we left Venlo and moved to a point not far from the west bank of the Rhine. The Royal Artillery were moving into position, more and more guns lined up behind us until thousands of guns were in position to give us the big sendoff.

On the evening of 23 March the barrage opened up and we set off in single file for the bank of the Rhine. Finding the way was easy because the Royal Artillery had a pair of Bofors guns firing two lines of red tracers to mark our route. We marched under the tracer and thousands of shells screamed over our heads and hit the enemy positions on the far bank. Before we cross, the RAF had a part to play. Spot on 2045 hrs, the artillery fire ceased and precisely on time the Pathfinders dropped flares over the town of Wesel, marking the target. More than 200 heavy bombers then plastered the place.

'We must have had the best ever view of RAF heavies doing their stuff. The ground shook with the exploding bombs, but we were surprised to see the Germans fighting back, sending up a barrage of anti-aircraft fire. Then it was our turn. We embarked in Buffaloes, tracked vehicles which could traverse ground or water, and set off across the Rhine. There

was little resistance, and although some German fire came our way and one craft received a direct hit from a mortar bomb, the landing was relatively unopposed.

'We landed dry-shod and set off, following the white tape to the formingup position. Then came the difficulty. The RAF had devastated the town, whole streets lay in ruins, the railway was a twisted lattice-work against the night sky, fires were raging out of control, and the Germans came out fighting. Even the general commanding Wesel came out of his bunker, pistol in hand, refused to surrender and was shot dead. All our study of maps and photos was not much use amid such a shambles, and we scrambled around bomb craters and over rubble, following the man in front, hoping someone remembered the way.

'At this point I made contact with the Brigade commander, Derek Mills -Roberts. He did not suffer fools gladly, or indeed at all, and anyone who was not doing what he ought to be doing was a fool! There was the Brigadier, standing on a pile of rubble, illuminated by the light of a burning building, urging his brigade to "Get a bloody move on." A Commando soldier, laden with all the paraphernalia of war, was hanging back a bit too much, and Mills-Roberts hopped off his pile with a cry of, "Close up, you bastard", and took a swipe at the chap's head. We speeded up and closed-up after that, my first experience of a wartime Commando Brigadier under the stress of battle.

'Next morning came the drone of aircraft engines and the skies filled with the parachutes of the 6th British and the 17th American Airborne Divisions dropping within our perimeter. My own memory is of a large American paratrooper landing almost on top of me, looking up and saying, "Am I glad to see you!" The Americans all sported at least a week's growth of beard. It seems the first thing they do in action is to stop shaving, so at least we greeted them as Royal Marines should, with clean shaves.'

Ken Adams also crossed the Rhine that night with 45 (Royal Marine) Commando. 'Being in F Troop (Heavy Weapons) we normally fired the Vickers MMG, but on this occasion we took a Bren, and as we scrambled out of the Buffalo, Jock dropped the Bren in the river. Imagine it ... the smoke and gunfire and us groping in the bottom of the Rhine for our weapon. However - success - we recovered it, full of mud of course, but Jock fired a few rounds and said, "I think it's OK ... I've got rid of the sludge."

Four hours after the Commandos landed, at 0200 hrs on 24 March, the divisions of the 9th US Army and the 15th (Scottish) Division of the British XII Corps began crossing. The 15th Division landed north of Xanten, where they were met by the German 84th Division and the 7th Parachute Division, while the 30th and 79th US Divisions of the 9th Army crossed the Rhine south of Wesel against light opposition from the German 180th and 'Hamburg' Divisions. The Americans then flung a bridge over the river and had tanks across by midmorning. This fight for the Wesel bridgehead was continuing when the glider and parachute forces arrived overhead at around 1000 hrs on 24 March.

Lt-Colonel Clifford Norbury, MBE, MC, was on the staff of the 6th Airborne Division. 'In 6th Airborne we reckoned we had nothing to learn from the 1st Airborne Division, as we were better at planning our operations and always considered it essential to jump or land as close to our objectives as possible. After Normandy we also appreciated that on a night drop a high percentage of kit and troops went astray - hence the daylight drop on the Rhine. In fact, there was a lot of smoke over the DZ's but at least we knew roughly where we were, and fortunately we had enough aircraft for us all to go in one lift.'

George Butler went in with the 13th Battalion of the Parachute Regiment. 'The flight was in daylight and over the drop zone we met with intense anti-aircraft fire, which fortunately caused very few casualties. Immediately on landing we swapped our helmets for red berets, rallied to the officers blowing the "tally-ho" on their hunting horns, took our objectives and secured the left flank in just over two hours. This position we held, in spite of German counter-attacks.

'Two days later, we struck out for the Baltic. The battalion policy was to wear our red berets and go for the Germans as hard as we could, wherever we found them. Provided the enemy were given no rest, the advance continued.'

Among those jumping that day was Gunner Jim Purser, with a Royal Artillery Fire Control party attached to the 8th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment. 'About 8 o'clock we were airborne. A vast fleet of aircraft headed towards the Rhine, but the journey was uneventful. There was little conversation, with everyone wrapped in his own thoughts. Once over the continent we could see our

fighter aircraft diving and circling on our flanks, and this gave us confidence. Somewhere over Belgium the 17th United States Airborne Division, which had taken off from bases in France, took up position on our right. The sight of so many aeroplanes, some towing gliders, must have given great joy to onlookers on the ground who had been liberated from Nazi oppression only in the last few months.

"With thirty minutes left it was time to check our equipment. We were stood up and faced the rear of the aircraft. I watched the American crewman remove the large door near the tail. It was a perfect spring day outside not a cloud in the sky - and pleasantly warm. Then the Rhine river difficult to make out in detail because of the smoke that had been used to cover the ground attack. The red light went on, followed by the order "Stand in the door!" Only two to three minutes left. All seemed quiet outside. Perhaps we had taken the Germans by surprise. Someone behind me yelled, "Here we come, you square-headed bastards!" The green light came on and we staggered towards the exit door. My watch registered four minutes past ten. Out in the slipstream my parachute snapped open and I felt very vulnerable. My kit bag slipped from me and tumbled to the ground. There seemed to be no Germans beneath me but I was drifting into trees. Pulling hard on my lift webs I landed on the edge of the wood and dived under some bushes to orientate myself and plan my next move.

"I had to move back along the drop line until I saw blue smoke - the rallying mark for 8th Para. Bn. About a dozen paras came out of the woods. I was glad to see them, and together we made our way quickly and cautiously to the rallying point. One hundred yards to our right was an old farm building - the only building left in sight. It did not seem to be occupied, and we left it alone. Beyond this building was a small copse where I met up with Captain Hastings and Jackson, but no sign yet of Jarvie.

"Things were beginning to hot up in the vicinity of the dropping zone, as the Germans started reacting. Some 88 mm shells were bursting in the trees above us, and we dug for all we were worth into the sandy soil. Jackson's nose began to bleed. He thought that he had been hit but was quickly reassured that it was due to pressure from the bursting shells. Soon news came through that Jarvie had been killed. Rumours later circulated on

the circumstances of his death. He has no known grave but there is a plaque bearing his name among the lists of others with no known graves in the Canadian War Cemetery in the Reichwald Forest. I assume he must have been hit by an 88 mm shell as he was coming down in his parachute.

"Late afternoon the whole battalion moved to take up position in the woods on some high ground about a mile distant. Our OP party remained attached to A Company, commanded by Captain Bob Flood. His conduct that day did much to help the morale of those of us who were in action for the first time. Digging-in and lining our trenches with discarded parachutes, we tried to make ourselves comfortable, but the night was cold and sleep was impossible. At about 8 o'clock on the Sunday morning there was the rumble of tanks, and lining the track we cheered as the 2nd Army tanks came up to us from the Rhine.

"From now on events began to move fast. The chase was on. In order to keep up the momentum of the advance into Hitler's Reich the 6th Airborne Division commandeered just about any vehicle that could be pressed into service. In addition to riding on the backs of tanks and in service vehicles, horse-drawn carts, steam rollers and fire engines could also be seen among the long convoy of transport. The Germans were still full of fight and were able to mount local counter-attacks. I remember that the SS made one determined attack in the Celle area, outside Hanover.'

Also arriving on the Rhine bank that morning was Peter Elliot Forbes of the 9th Battalion, Parachute Regiment. 'I was a twenty-eight-year-old lieutenant. We took off from an airfield in East Anglia at about 0730 hrs and prior to take-off an American flight engineer took some snapshots of my "stick" of twelve paratroopers attached to 3rd Para. Brigade HQ. The engineer sent copies of the snaps to my wife, though I didn't see them till well after the war. There was a US crew in the Dakota and the jumpmaster (despatcher) was an excitable little man in a baseball jacket and flaksuit, who dashed about a great deal after takeoff.

"The British half of this airborne armada set course for a drop zone in the Diersfordter Wald, a wood north of Wesel. Over Belgium I opened a bottle of whisky to flavour a half-warm tea cannister someone had scrounged. The journey was passed in singing, card games and dice until H-Hour (1000 hrs)

approached and we prepared to "stand-in-the-door", where I was second in the queue. The turbulence as we approached the Rhine could have been caused by the smoke from artillery supporting the ground forces, but there was heavy flak at our level, about 1,000 feet.

"The red "stand-by" light was on and we were waiting for the green "Go!" when the port engine, only yards away from the door, burst into orange flames and black smoke, either hit with flak or overstressed. The jump-Master screamed for us to get back from the door and ran up to the cockpit; fortunately the "green" didn't come on. This was accompanied by a violent bank to the left which almost chucked us out of the door and through the flames. Over the shoulder of "Number One" I saw the ground getting rapidly nearer.

"The pilot did an excellent job, flying the machine on one engine, the flames were put out, we scrambled back to our seats and I consumed what was left of my whisky. We landed an hour later at Louvain, wherc I spent some time organizing transport to catch up with our division, and we rejoined the 3rd Parachute Brigade near Hamminkeln on the following day.' Dixie Dean jumped with his "stick" of the 13th Parachute Battalion: 'Our jump-Master was a talkative, scruffy New Yorker. Shortly after takeoff he came round with cigarettes, and finding that few of us smoked, disappeared into the cabin, to come out again and offer us candy. That was the last we saw of him until he announced, "Twenty minutes to go."

'You couldn't criticize the pilots: their airmanship was first class. We flew in a very tight battalion box of forty aircraft and the formation they adopted - nine abreast - gave the impression you could jump from one wing-tip to another. Approaching the drop zone, flak was encountered and instead of descending to a dropping height of 600 feet, with engines throttled back to stalling speed, we raced across the DZ flat out, at around 1,000 feet.

'Visibility was poor, no more than 200 yards, with smoke drifting across from the burning town of Wesel. There was a certain amount of small-arms fire, and following heavy casualties during the Ardennes campaign in January we had a lot of young soldiers in the unit who dived for cover when the first shots were fired. To their credit, it required only a few words of encouragement to get them on their feet

again. The black rectangle with a white border painted on the back of our jumping jackets concentrated 13th Battalion personnel in woods along the road at the edge of the drop zone.

'As I arrived there, prisoners were already being rounded up. Arthur Higgins, one of my sergeants, was busy disarming a group of twenty or more. "What'll you have?" he called. "A Luger or a Schmeisser?" Since I already had a Sten and 9 mm pistol, to say nothing of a fighting knife and several grenades, I settled for a pair of German binoculars with a magnification of 10 x 50 - far superior to Army issue. I still have them.

'Troopers of the American 17th Airborne Division were also landing, among them Jack Ariola of the 194th Glider Infantry: '24 March 1945 was the day we were to invade Germany. They took us to the marshalling area on 21 March and there we were oriented on our landing area. On the morning of 24 March they got us out of bed two or three hours before daylight.

'When we went to eat, I couldn't believe what I was seeing: there were crates of eggs stacked as high as a man's head. We hadn't seen a real egg since we had left the States, all they had given us was powdered eggs. I stepped up to the cook and when he asked me how many I wanted, I told him to cook me a dozen. I sat down and ate every one of them. I had forgotten that every time I got in a glider I was air sick.

'After breakfast we got all our equipment together and headed out to the airfield. That was truly a sight to behold. Gliders and C47s were lined up on the air strip as far as we could see. I believe that this was just one of nine or ten airfields they were using in France and England. The British 6th Airborne were also going with us. There were a total of more than 16,000 airborne troops in that invasion, and the air armada was over 500 miles long. It was the largest airborne invasion of the Second World War.

'The day before, my platoon leader, Lieutenant Dillon, asked me if I wanted to carry a machine-gun across the Rhine river. I told him "Hell, no", though he was a good leader and a fine man and we would do just about anything for him. He explained that Lieutenant Webb refused to load in his glider unless there was an automatic weapon in the glider. I told him that I would carry it, on one

condition, that just as soon as we landed, I could leave the machine-gun and return to my squad. He agreed.

'When I went through basic training, I had trained as a machine-gunner, and I was the only one qualified for that job, so that was how I was elected. Reluctantly, I went over to the other glider and got the machine-gun and a belt of ammunition. I threw the belt of ammunition across my shoulders and got ready to load on the glider. Finally, we loaded and took off. The glider I was in had a glass or plastic bubble in the top and we could look up into the sky. I saw a bunch of fighter planes flying overhead.

'We got to the Rhine and just before we crossed the pilot cut us loose from the tow plane. This was also the first time they had used a double tow on an invasion - one C47 was towing two gliders. When the pilot cut loose we started down. The ack-ack - anti-aircraft fire - was so thick I believe we could have got out and walked on it. Bullets and flak were coming through the glider, and every time one hit the bottom of the glider and went out through the top it sounded like the crack of a whip, only ten times louder - very demoralizing..

'All around us we could see planes shot down, gliders falling from the sky, nose first, wings shot off and tails gone. Every one of them had fifteen good men inside. After we had glided about eight miles into German territory, we landed. We jumped the canal and went through a barbed wire fence and came to a stop about 50 yards from the road. I was sitting next to the door, so I was the first man out. I opened the door and started firing the machine-gun at a farmhouse off to my left. I didn't know if there were any Germans in it or not, but I meant to make them keep their heads down and not be able to fire at the guys as they unloaded out of the glider.

'I headed for the canal and set up the machine-gun position. While I was lying there I saw a woman running down the road like her house was on fire. There was small-arms fire and gliders still coming down, and ack-ack still in the air. I saw one glider coming down on fire, burning from one end to the other. Later I learned that one of our lieutenants was in it, Lieutenant Loomis.

'A wing of one glider fell off as it passed overhead and down came the glider. It was horrible, knowing that a bunch of men was inside. I could see C47s catching fire and crashing to the ground, but

there were fewer men in those C47s than there were in the gliders.

'After everybody had unloaded and all the guys had got over to the canal, I hollered at Lieutenant Webb and told him that here was his machine-gun and I was going to take my leave. He didn't seem to like it too much, but that was the deal I had made; he just nodded his head and I walked away. I've landed near Wesel. In our first twenty-four hours we took about 3,000 German prisoners. As near as I can recall, during the first twenty-four hours we lost about 394 killed and several hundred wounded. That was just in our division; I don't know how many people the British lost.'

The combined airborne assault, Operation Varsity, by 17,000 men of two divisions, carried in 1,500 aircraft and 1,300 gliders, required considerable precision. The airborne drop zones lay northwest of Wesel, around the woods of the Diersfordter Wald, 6th Airborne landing north of the village of Hamminkeln, 17th US Airborne to the south - and many men were scattered in the drop.

Lt-Colonel Crookenden gives his account of Varsity. 'I was CO of the 9th Parachute Battalion. Our brigadier was James Hill, who had commanded the 1st Parachute Brigade in North Africa, winning his first DSO and an MC. On 23 March, D minus 1, everybody wrote their so-called "last letters" for posting after the drop. Company officers had the job of censoring the company's mail and the OC of B Company was not amused by a lance corporal who wrote no less than eleven "last letters" to eleven different women, swearing undying devotion to each one.

'I was getting into my jeep for a final tour of the battalion's aircraft, lined up round the perimeter track, when I heard the sound of a shot. Driving down the line I found one of my sergeants lying on the ground, looking ruefully at the ugly mess of his right foot. He was whisked away in a jeep and subsequently faced a court martial for a self-inflicted wound - a sad business as he had done well in Normandy. I later discovered he had done it because his wife threatened to leave him if he ever jumped again.

'Then we emplaned. The American aircraft captain and the crew chief, a warrant officer, came into the fuselage and checked that the pilot would give us the standard 4-minute "red" and then the "green".

Then the engines started and we began our taxiing towards the runway, a long queue of thirty-six Dakotas. Our aircraft turned onto the runway, lined up with two others, and all three set off together. Thirteen minutes later all eighty aircraft from Wethersfield were in the air and had formed up into their nine ship elements - a fine piece of flying discipline.

'Next thing was the order, "Stand Up! Hook Up!" Each man fastened the hook of his strop on the cable, fixed the safety pin - rather carefully, as we had no reserve chutes in those days - and turned aft. Just aft of the door the crew chief in his flying helmet listened to the pilot. I was jumping No. 3. The "red" came on and we shuffled forward to the door. I could feel the slipstream and saw the river below us. Seconds later the "green" came on and out we went.

'Once my canopy developed, I could see the DZ exactly like the briefing photos. There was a double line of trees along the road to the west and square wood in the middle. The ground was covered with parachutes of the other battalions and I could see men running towards their objectives. There was a rattle of machine-gun fire, the thump of a mortar bomb and the crack and thump of two near misses. It was a most concentrated and successful drop and I felt a great surge of confidence as I sailed down to earth.

'In fact, we had reached the Rhine 9 minutes early, and the guns firing on the AA defences had to cease fire to let us fly through their trajectories. A good many of our aircraft were hit by 20mm cannon and machine-gun fire, but only the lead ship was shot down. Happily all the crew bailed out.

'I landed in the middle of the DZ, banged my quick release and stood up. I could see our blue smoke going up at our planned rendezvous in the northeast corner of the DZ and a lot of men moving towards it. The square wood was the scene of a brisk battle, but my aim was to get to our rendezvous as fast as I could. There was no sign of my batman, Lance Corporal Wilson, or of CSM Harrold, who had jumped after me.

'A few minutes later I reached the rendezvous, where RSM Dusty Miller was standing by his blue smoke cannister, grinning broadly and guiding men into their positions in a tight circle round the rendezvous. I wanted to get the mortars' baseplates set as soon as possible and grabbed a

passing mortarman, saying, "Any sign of Mr Jefferson?" (the platoon commander). "He's copped it, sir", came the reply. "Right through the head, a horrible mess." Two minutes later, Alan Jefferson came bouncing in - he had been a ballet dancer and walked like one - with a broad smile and a cheerful, "Good morning, sir."

'By 1330 hrs we were dug-in on our final positions, a picnic compared to Normandy. The next excitement was a counter-attack by a German assault gun and a few brave infantry, who came straight up the road through B Company's position; the gun reached B Company's HQ. Everyone dived into their slits or the ditch, but the company clerk, Tillotson, jumped up as it passed and banged a Gammon bomb on the engine covers. The gun stopped, a German put his head out of the hatch, Tillotson shot him and the rest surrendered. The SP gun was still a runner, so two ex-RTR men in the battalion took it over and it rumbled along with us for a week or so as we marched on into Germany.

'The Canadian Parachute Battalion succeeded in clearing the south side of the DZ, but they met stiff resistance from men of the German 7th Parachute Division. Their CO, Lt-Colonel Nicklin, was killed, still in his parachute, when caught in a tree. The gamble of dropping on top of the enemy positions paid off, as most of them were too shocked by seeing 2,000 men landing on top of them to cause us any major damage. The brigade loss on the DZ was some eighty killed and wounded. It was in bringing in some of these wounded under fire that the Canadian Corporal Topham won the Victoria Cross.'

Rifleman Paddy Devlin from Galway, an Irishman serving with the British Army, landed by glider with the 1st Battalion of the Royal Ulster Rifles. 'About 10.30 a.m. we cast off from the aircraft tug and on our own. The glider could only fly a mile, fully loaded, for every thousand feet in height. I sat alert and ready, gripping my machine-gun, intent on getting out fast as soon as the glider landed. The two lads on either side of the door stood up and slid the door into the roof, and before anyone could move I was out that door like a jack rabbit. I jumped to the ground and ran to the tail to cover the rear as I had often done in training. As I ran I saw German soldiers in the two-storeyed farmhouse about 50 or 60 yards away, and one of them was firing a Schmeisser submachine-gun in our direction. I threw myself

down, positioning my gun, and brought it into the aim position, at the same time releasing the safety catch. This only took seconds but the Germans nipped back into the house. I put a few quick bursts after them through the door and windows to keep them pinned inside while the platoon got out and unloaded our spares. They say that only one in five gliders landed undamaged of the 400 or so used by our division. I was in one of the undamaged.

I continued firing short bursts through the windows and doors, and as I was changing a magazine there was a shout that the Germans were running for the village - Hamminkeln. I looked up and saw about a dozen of them, legging it for cover behind a tall hedge. In my excitement I fired before I was properly into the aim and my burst hit the ground in front of me. I had to wait a few seconds before I could aim and fire again. This time I sprayed them as they reaching the cover of the hedge, but I could not say if I hit any of them. As I looked about me at the platoon lying beside the glider, everybody was flat on the ground and I seemed to be the only one firing. Then there was a shout that two German tanks were coming up the road. This road ran north-south and bounded the landing zone, about 70 yards or so away.

I repositioned my gun so that I could fire at them as they came up opposite the glider. I would only have fired if the tank commander had his head exposed from the turret. In the event they weren't tanks but armoured personnel half-tracks. The Germans were standing up in the first one, shoulder to shoulder. They had obviously packed it as much as possible to get back to their own troops on the other side of the river Issel via the village of Hamminkeln. As they came opposite me I let them have a burst and they all collapsed behind the armoured sides. I couldn't have hit them all but there was a lot of shouting and screaming.

'The troops in the second vehicle were concealed behind the armour, and having seen what happened to the first vehicle they were travelling about 50 yards behind it. I sprayed it with a burst anyway, hoping to hit the driver. Both vehicles continued on towards Hamminkeln.'

Although the drop and glider landing zones had been bombed and strafed by Allied aircraft, the aircraft and gliders met fierce anti-aircraft fire as they came in low across the river. The US Transport Group dropping 6th Airborne lost forty-seven aircraft

shot down or damaged out of the 120 Dakota C47s taking part, and over a quarter of the glider pilots taking part in 'Varsity' were killed or wounded.

Frank Haddock, an RAF pilot, had been moved onto gliders after Arnhem. 'At briefing it sounded so simple. We would be in one large formation with the 9th US Air Force and 2nd TAF giving top cover - flak would be negligible because 2nd TAF had blasted everything in the area during the previous two weeks, but German records show that there were 712 light guns and 103 heavy guns in the landing areas.

'We climbed away into a clear blue sky, across the river Orwell. The sight of 120 tugs and Horsa gliders was exhilarating, and we saw people in the streets of Herne Bay waving as the aerial armada moved across Kent. We crossed the French coast and later the message came from the Halifax captain that we were within sight of the Rhine.

'At that moment a Stirling bomber came across our formation in a shallow dive, its starboard engines and wing on fire, the crew bailing out in quick succession. We saw five bodies in space before their parachutes developed. It was an awesome sight and we felt that all was not well. The tug pilot called out that we were crossing the river and we were immediately aware of flak bursting around us and the smell of cordite. Another call from the tug crew - "Good luck and come back safely, lads" - followed by "Flapjack, flapjack", our signal to cast off.

'The glider became very quiet. Even at 2,500 feet we knew a considerable battle was in progress. The visibility was hopeless - a heavy smoke haze blanketed the landing area. We reduced our air speed to 100 m.p.h. and watched the other Horsas ahead as another Horsa came diving in our direction. It was necessary to take evasive action and we found ourselves heading back into our own aircraft. It was reminiscent of a dog fight aircraft weaving all over the sky - except that we couldn't gain height and the all-up weight did not aid manoeuvrability.

'My colleague, Cec Law, called out, "I've got it. Look out for a space to land." Peering through the smoke, I pointed out a clear field to port. A stream of pink 20 mm tracer shells came towards us and followed us through the turn, getting closer. It was within a yard of the cockpit when it ceased. Whether the gunner ran out of ammo or came under attack

from the paras, we never knew. We completed the turn, full flap down, and in we went.

'Immediately we landed I was to jump out with Bren-gun while the Army lads off-loaded their gun. I heard Cec bawl at the Royal Artillery Staff Sergeant "What? Are you telling me you don't know how to get the bloody gun out?" There we were with shooting going on and nobody knew how to get the load out; the load was disgorged in about 15 minutes.

'As I lay underneath the aircraft, I watched the crew and passengers of another glider being taken prisoner by German paratroopers. We could see a farmhouse which we approached warily, only to discover a large pool of blood in the hall, some wounded Germans in the cellar, and the family in a bunker in the garden. It had been captured by our paras and abandoned because of its isolated position. I remained at the window in the kitchen as a strange whooshing, whistling noise went across the top of the house, followed by a second and a third. They were US gliders going in to land about a mile away. This confused the situation even more, as we were unaware that any Americans would be in our area.

'At about 1500 hrs I sighted a lone figure in a red beret, rifle slung on his shoulder, strolling along the edge of a field: the first friendly face we had encountered since landing. Our visitor turned out to be Staff Sergeant Andy Kerr, an Army glider pilot from our own squadron.

'He suggested that we might consolidate with the paras who were dug in near Hamminkeln. As we returned to the house a US paratrooper appeared with a terrible face wound. He was able to walk but his lower jaw was badly shattered and his ragged dressing was completely soaked. We used my field dressing to patch him up, loaded him on the jeep and headed across fields scattered with dead and a burned-out C47 Dakota.

'It was a relief to find ourselves in good company again - a motley crew of about sixty British and US paras, air landing brigade soldiers and glider pilots, including several from our own squadron. We settled down for the night, taking watches of one and a half hours and a similar period of "rest". It was going to be bitterly cold but, come what may, we were with friends and our spirits were high.'

Another RAF glider pilot was Dickie Taylor. 'During the summer of 1944 there were a number of trained RAF pilots at the Grand Hotel in Harrogate,

Yorkshire, occupied with various odd-ball postings. I was one of these but the disaster at Arnhem that September altered all that. We were told we were going to see some action and would be transferred to the Glider Pilot Regiment of 6th Airborne Division. On the Rhine crossing, our glider was loaded with a jeep, a 75mm Howitzer, ammo trailer, and a gun crew of three. There was thick smoke everywhere and we could hardly see the ground as we went down. We saw some parachutes coming down. The glider was soon unloaded and the gun crew left us. This was about 11 o'clock in the morning. There was no resistance from the enemy, though we could hear the chatter of German machine-guns around us and learned later that a good many of the airborne troops had run into opposition. We also learned that our flight commander, Captain Strathern, had been killed soon after landing.'

By the end of the day, the 6th Airborne Division had taken 1,400 casualties among the 7,220 men who dropped that morning, but had linked up with the 15th (Scottish) Division advancing from the river, and their landing and drop zones were secure. The US 17th Airborne Division, landing 9,650-strong, had about 1,300 casualties; twenty-one parachute or tug aircraft were shot down and sixty more damaged over the drop zones. The two airborne divisions took 3,500 prisoners and by the end of the day had linked up with the ground forces all around their perimeters.

The fierce resistance to the Plunder-Varsity assault removed any idea that the German Army was ready to give up the fight. A good indication of the severity of the fighting around Wesel comes from that day's casualty figures.. The 51st (Highland) Division had 859 men killed or wounded during the assault phase of Operation Plunder the 15th (Scottish) Division, 824. Total 21st Army Group casualties for Plunder and Varsity - British, Canadian and American - came to 6,781 men killed or wounded. This can be compared with the 10,000 men killed or wounded landing on a fifty mile front on D-Day.

While the assault troops and the paratroopers were fighting to secure their objectives on the east bank, more troops - American, British and Canadian - were coming across the river. John Melmoth crossed the Rhine with the 'Desert Rats' of the British 7th Armoured Division: 'I was at the Rhine crossing with 1st/5th Queen's of 131st Brigade. We crossed in a "Buffalo", so full of troops and so low in the water

that we could dangle our fingers in the river. Being a non-swimmer, I was concerned that it would sink and totally disregarded the considerable amount of enemy fire until admonished by our sergeant to "Get your bloody head down." I was wounded shortly after the landing and did not rejoin the battalion until a week before the German surrender.'

Casualties on 'Plunder' were not restricted to the lower ranks. Major General T. G. Rennie, commander of the 51st (Highland) Division, was killed during the day, as was the German commander in Wesel, Major General Freidrich Deutsch.

There are various accounts of how the German general met his end. One American account states that he fell 'leading his men in a desperate counterattack against the Commandos.' A British account states that General Deutsch was killed in the bombing. A third and rather more vivid account comes from Philip Pritchard of No. 6 Commando:

'In the middle of the battle, passing through Wesel, we found a Commando lance corporal digging a grave in a garden. This seemed strange and we asked him why he was doing it. He said his section had been searching a house when they were confronted by a German officer. The lance corporal immediately said, "Hands up!" but the German replied, "I am General Deutsch and I will only surrender to an officer of equal rank." The lancecorporal was fed up with all this and said "Well, this will equalize you", and fired his Tommy-gun at the general, with fatal results.

'Brigadier Mills-Roberts was furious, and as a punishment he ordered the lance-corporal to bury the general. Anyway, that was the gist of his story. As we went off, the unfortunate lance-corporal was still digging.

Another man in action that day was Lieutenant Hugh Clark of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. "The company had a *"coup de main"* task to seize and hold a road bridge over the Issel. We evacuated the glider quickly but realized that we were not within sight of the bridge. In fact, there were no landmarks we recognized and while we were trying to locate our position, the glider came under fire. This was returned by our two pilots manning a Bren-gun.

'We made a run for the cover of the river bank, section by section. We made that safely but then one of our section commanders was killed by a

sniper. We saw our glider hit by mortar bombs and catch fire, so our small packs and reserve ammunition were lost. We had, in fact, landed a mile south of the bridge, between the river and the autobahn.

'As we made our way back to our regimental area, we were joined by men from other units who had landed off-target. As I had a complete platoon, those who had joined us took position in the centre. Moving along the railway line we suffered a further casualty, a man shot in the leg. As he was unable to continue we applied a field dressing and left him, with the assurance that we would send stretcher-bearers for him as soon as possible. Apart from a good deal of machine-gun and sniper fire, the rest of the route back was uneventful. We passed through the Royal Ulster Rifles' positions to the HQ at the railway station.

'After reporting there, I continued with my platoon to B Company HQ at the level crossing. There I reported to my company commander, Major Gilbert Rahr, who asked me where I had been and why I had taken so long. He told me the bridge had been captured intact just after landing. Casualties in the battalion had been severe. No. 17 Platoon's glider had crashed with no survivors. No. 18 Platoon crashed into the edge of a wood on the east side of the autobahn; there were nine survivors, two of whom were badly injured and six of the survivors rejoined the company forty-eight hours later.

'My platoon was in reserve and ordered to dig-in along the railway line towards C Company on our left. We spent an anxious afternoon consolidating our positions, avoiding sniper fire and checking on our ammunition. By late evening the company were down to our last box of .303 ammunition. German tanks were reported on the other side of the autobahn and from time to time we called for fire from a troop of 5.5 inch guns supporting us from the west bank of the Rhine.

'Unfortunately, one of the guns was firing short, so one round in four was liable to land in the company position. On one occasion a group of Royal Engineers with a trailer-load of demolition charges arrived to mine the bridge; as we dived for cover from the shells, we realized the consequences if the trailer was hit, for one of the engineers who made it to a slit-trench just before I did, remarked, "I hate to tell you, sir, but there is half a ton of explosives just 6 feet from your head!"

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'At about 2200 hrs, a German tank edged its way to the far side of the bridge. Lt David Rice, with one of his platoon, manned a 6-pounder antitank gun while my platoon supplied illumination with 2-inch mortar parachute flares. Although they scored several hits, they made no impression on the tank, but caused it to withdraw. At about midnight the Germans attacked again, their infantry crossed the river and forced No. 16 Platoon to pull back. The company commander ordered me to lead my platoon in an immediate counter-attack and retake the house by the river bank and the bridge. I led two sections in a bayonet charge, firing from the hip as we covered the 120 yards to the river bank.

'One amusing incident ... we had covered half the distance when a corporal on my right said, "Hold it a minute, sir, you're on your Jack", for having started in a straight line, we had gone into arrowhead formation with me in front. We arrived to find the Germans had pulled back but we could see two tanks no more than 100 yards away and could hear their infantry moving round them. The platoon took up position on the river bank and engaged the leading tank with our PIAT. We scored at least five hits and I can recall our disappointment when the tank did not "brew up". Both tanks pulled back out of range but after a brief interval began to creep forward again, and shortly before 0200 hrs a decision was taken to blow the bridge. The engineers had done a good job and the bridge went up with a tremendous bang.

'On the Sunday morning we reported our company strength as two officers and forty-five other ranks, all that remained out of a total of more than 120. Breakfast next morning was our first proper meal since we had left England forty-eight hours before, and later that day we commenced our advance to Wismar on the Baltic.'

Lt-Colonel Clifford Norbury continues his story: 'The ground troops had used a lot of smoke to cover the assault across the river and this had drifted east. My glider arrived safely over the area and dived into the smoke, the pilots hoping they would see the ground before we hit it. They did, but levelling out to land, we hit a bank which took off our undercarriage and a large portion of the floor. We came to rest with us looking at the ground under our feet. We had opened the door before landing, so I ordered everyone out double-quick. Within a few yards I saw a long, large hole, presumably dug by the farmer. We

dived into this and as we did so, a shell hit the remains of our glider, and the jeep, trailer and all our kit went up in flames. Miraculously, my whole team was unscathed.

'Having collected my wits, I saw we were within 20 yards of a railway line. As there was only one railway line in the area, this told me that we were about 500 yards south of where we had planned to establish Rear Division HQ. We set off northwards, finding the farmhouse I was looking for without difficulty. On the way we passed some German and American dead and I realized that at least one stick of American parachutists must have been dropped too far north and had dealt with the Germans who would have been there to receive us. I always felt I owed my life to that mis-dropped stick.

'Not many members of Rear Divisional HQ had reached our location, but one party was the Royal Signals team with our wireless link to the UK. We commenced setting this up. In those days, wirelesses were nothing like as efficient as they are now, and I wasn't very optimistic about getting through, but amazingly, when the signallers opened up we heard the UK Airborne Corps at Moor Park loud and clear. I confirmed that the re-supply drop should go ahead in the late afternoon as planned, and recognized the voice on the wireless as that of John Darlington, with whom I had shared an office in England. I therefore terminated my transmission by saying, "Tell Eileen I'm OK", and before she had finished her lunch that day, my wife received a phone call from dear old John!'

Rick Hall of 67 Company, Royal Army Service Corps, had come all the way from the Western Desert with the 7th Armoured Division and kept a diary of his time in Germany: 'I had been in Germany in 1936, when a group of us cycled there from England to see the Berlin Olympics. We didn't have tickets so I didn't see the Games, but I saw some Blackshirts smashing a Jew's head against a brick wall. I thought then, "One day these people will have to be sorted out", and here we were to do it.

'Anyway, some entries ... 23 March 1945: Slept in cab at Kevelaer, Germany. Railway station really bashed about. 24 March: Rhine crossing. Big paratroop concentrations going over. Took a dozen carriers of ammunition over the Rhine that night on pontoon bridge, bucking and swaying with the

current. Sunday, 25 March: Went to pictures, saw *Adam Had Four Sons.*'

With the bridgehead secure, the engineers of the 9th US Army had the first pontoon bridge over the river by the evening of 24 March. More bridges followed in the British sector and by 25 March, 21st Army Group were pouring across into the heart of Germany.

The war went on across the Rhine, the Allies driving deeper into Germany day by day. Four days after the assault the bridgehead over the Rhine at Wesel was twenty miles deep and thirty-five miles wide. With three Allied bridgeheads over the river - at Wesel, Remagen and Oppenheim - the last German defences began to come down with a rush. The III Corps of Hodges' 1st US Army began to advance rapidly from Remagen heading east, along the south face of the Ruhr, while Patton now had a full corps across the Rhine at Oppenheim; and on 26 March Patch's 7th US Army crossed the Rhine near Mannheim. In the 21st Army Group area, the British 2nd Army, supported by the 9th US Army, was pushing north towards the Elbe, Bremen and Hamburg. On 27 March, the plan was still for 21st Army Group to head for the North German plain, Hamburg and Berlin, while Bradley's 12th US Army Group overran the Ruhr. Then, on 28 March, came a change of plan, and with that change, controversy.

Albert I. Schantz from Reading, Pennsylvania, arrived in Europe at this time. 'On 7 March 1945 I arrived in Priim, Germany, and was assigned as a rifleman to Company 'A', 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th US Infantry Division. The 4th Division had suffered many casualties after 199 consecutive days in combat during and after the Ardennes campaign and required about a 50 percent replacement.

'After retraining and re-organizing, we boarded trucks and travelled south through Luxembourg to Metz and Nancy in France, then east to Luneville and north to Worms in Germany. There we crossed the Rhine and engaged the enemy again on the front line on 29 March 1945.

'During our first battle we were pursuing the Germans when the 60 mm mortar gunner collapsed from exhaustion and I became the gunner. That meant carrying a 60 mm mortar and a .45 pistol in place of the M-1 rifle. The mortar weighed about 60 lb. with the base plate, but the promotion and the

Combat Infantryman badge gave me a rise in pay. I can't remember exactly how much the increase was but I do remember that the Private rating paid \$30 per month and the Combat Infantryman badge paid an additional \$10 per month. I suppose the promotion rise was about \$5 per month, all of which raised my monthly pay to about \$45.

'During one of our battles we encountered sniper fire and our platoon leader spotted the sniper in the steeple of a church on top of the hill we were trying to take. He asked me to set up my mortar and knock the sniper out of the steeple. I set up and knocked the sniper off the church with the first shot and the rest of my platoon cheered. I don't know if this shot was the reason for my first stripe, on 1 April 1945.'

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We call your special attention to the back page of this issue because it contains two important messages. The first is the appointment of Joe Kryszakowski as the Treasurer of the WWII 315th Troop Carrier Group Association U.S.A.A.F. and Marty Dean as Acting Assistant Treasurer. So, in future, please send your dues payment to Joe at the address given in the announcement on the back page.

The other important message is the reminder to all our readers to fill in and mail the enclosed reunion Registration form along with your check or money order to **Armed Forces Reunions, Inc. P.O. Box 11327, Norfolk VA 23517 and mark the envelope "Attn: 315th Troop Carrier Group Association. The hotel reservation form (also enclosed) should be filled in and mailed direct to the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee hotel at 333 W. Kilbourn, Milwaukee WI 53203. Note: just cut off the bottom part of the hotel form which you've filled in so it will fit into a small envelope---no need to send the entire form.**

HYATT REGENCY

MILWAUKEE

414-276-1234

1996

HOTEL LOCATION

The Hyatt Regency Milwaukee is located at 333 West Kilbourn Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53203, in the heart of the city. A soaring atrium greets guests in a city where festivity and hospitality are a way of life. The hotel is 10 minutes from Mitchell Airport, within walking distance of the Performing Arts Center, Milwaukee Center Theatre District, Bradley Center, and is connected by skywalks to the MECCA (Milwaukee Exposition/Convention Center and Arena), the Federal Plaza, and the Grand Avenue Shopping Mall.

Directions:

- From the North: I-43 south into downtown Milwaukee. Exit Wells Street/Civic Center. Turn left onto Wells, go 6 blocks to 4th Street. Turn left onto 4th. Go 1 block to Kilbourn, turn right to the Hyatt.
- From the Northwest: Take Hwy. 41 south to Hwy. 45-south. Follow 45-south to Milwaukee and connect onto 94-east into downtown. Continue onto 794-east. Exit onto Plankington Avenue. Curve left onto Plankington, go north 4 1/2 blocks to Kilbourn. Turn left onto Kilbourn, go 1 block to Hyatt on your left.
- From the West: I-94 east into downtown Milwaukee and continue east on 794-east. Exit in the right lane onto Plankington Avenue. Curve left onto Plankington, go 4 blocks north to Kilbourn. Turn left. Go 1 block to the Hyatt on the left.
- From the Southwest: From Rockford: 90-north to Beloit, WI 43-north.
From Beloit and Lake Geneva into Milwaukee area. Take left lane onto 45-north/894-north. Follow to 94-east. Take 94-east into downtown Milwaukee. Continue onto 794-east. Exit in right lane onto Plankington Avenue. Curve left onto Plankington, go 4 1/2 blocks to Kilbourn. Turn left onto Kilbourn. Go 1 block to Hyatt on the left.

HOTEL EXTRAS

The Hyatt Regency Milwaukee has 483 luxurious guest rooms. Each room features a kingsize or two double beds, color television, an ironing board, and numerous bath/toilet amenities. The hotel gift shop in the lobby features a newsstand. For relaxation and fun, guests can take advantage of the fully equipped health club.

Handicapped accessible and non-smoking rooms are subject to availability. Please request when making your reservation. Check in time is 3pm and check out is 12noon.

The hotel offers dining in three restaurants:

- The Pilsner Palace which serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Open 6:30am 'til midnight. Opens at 7:00am weekends.
 - 333 An American Restaurant (fine dining.) Open for dinner.
 - Polaris which serves lunch and dinner. Open for cocktails at 4pm. Dinner 5pm 'til 11pm.
 - Room service is available 6:30am until midnight.
- Many other restaurants are available within walking distance of the hotel. The front desk will assist guests with suggestions.

AIRPORT SHUTTLE

Limousine Services provide shuttle service from Mitchell Airport to the hotel from 5:15am until 5:15pm. The shuttle is available outside Baggage Claim Area 3. The current fare is \$7.50/per person, one way.

NEARBY RV PARK

Listed below are several campgrounds which offer hookup services. Please contact directly for information, reservations, and directions:

- Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park, 8425 Hwy. 38, Caledonia, WI 53108, (414) 835-2565
- Happy Acres Kampgrounds, 22230 45th Street, Bristol, WI 53104, (414) 857-7373
- Wisconsin State Fair Park, (414) 226-7035 (open April 1 through October 31)

315th TROOP CARRIER GROUP
HYATT REGENCY MILWAUKEE, MILWAUKEE, WI
SEPTEMBER 4 - 8, 1996

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

03:00 Arrival and Registration until 7pm. Hospitality Room open.
Evening on your own.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

07:00 Registration continues until 8am.
08:30 Board bus at hotel for Basler Turbo Conversions in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
10:00 Arrive at Basler for a tour of the factory where DC-3's are remanufactured to meet the standards set by today's technology.
11:00 Reboard bus for the Experimental Aircraft Association's Air Adventure Museum.
11:15 Arrive at the museum and enjoy a deli lunch buffet served until 12:30pm.
12:30 Take a self-guided tour of the museum. See one of several films and explore the many different exhibits at the Museum: Antique/Classic, where you will see a replica of the Wright Flyer and the Spirit of St. Louis; Homebuilts, an innovative display of aircraft built by enthusiasts for personal use; Aerobatics and Air Racing, where you will explore limits of aerial maneuvers and see the craft that led us to faster, safer air transportation. See the Air Challengers, a display which expands our horizons in aircraft design and records; and the Eagle Hanger, which memorializes those men and machines who fought beneath the stars and stripes in defense of freedom - a magnificent panorama of WWII aircraft, events, and activities.
03:30 Reboard bus at the museum to return to the hotel by 5pm.
\$36/Person includes bus, escort, lunch, and admission.
02:00 Registration continues until 5pm.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

09:30 Board of Directors meeting until 11am.
01:30 Board bus at the hotel for a narrated driving tour of Milwaukee's landmarks and attractions. See the beautiful shores of Lake Michigan and witness the distinctive architecture in the ethnic communities of Milwaukee. As you enjoy the mixture of 19th and 20th century buildings, your guide will tell the hilarious stories of Milwaukee's early pioneers and bring you up to date on the city's present. Visit the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, otherwise known as the Domes. Tour the only horticultural structure of its kind in the world, with three magnificent glass domes. Each dome features a distinct type of plant life: tropical, desert, and one with a changing display of flowers.
03:30 Back at the hotel.
\$19/Person includes bus, guide, and admission.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

09:30 Business meeting until 11am.
09:45 Board bus at the hotel for a ladies' trip to the Pabst Mansion, home of Captain Frederick Pabst.
10:00 Disembark and tour the Mansion, which was built by the beer baron between 1890 and 1892. An exquisite example of Flemish Renaissance Revival Style, this house is on the National Register of Historic Places. Finish your tour with a trip to the gift shop.
11:15 Reboard bus and proceed to the Pabst Theater.
11:30 Arrive at the theater. Built in 1895, this historic landmark is world famous. Many believe it to be one of the most beautiful Victorian theaters in existence.
12:30 Reboard bus to return to the hotel by 12:45pm.
06:30 Cash bar until 7:30pm.
07:30 Banquet dinner is served, followed by dancing.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

09:45 Board shuttle bus at hotel for the Edelweiss River cruise. A second shuttle will leave the hotel at approximately 10am.
10:00 Arrive at the pier to board the Edelweiss. Enjoy a delicious brunch as you cruise through downtown Milwaukee and into Lake Michigan. The dining room is fully glass enclosed, affording passengers an unsurpassed view of historic monuments and the city's gorgeous skyline.
12:30 Reboard the bus to return to the hotel by 12:45pm. Second shuttle will leave the Edelweiss at approximately 12:45pm.
\$44/Person includes shuttle bus, escort, and brunch cruise.
Farewells and departures.

Again, in this issue, we're happy to be printing another of Ziggy's stories. As always, it's a pleasure to read one of his beautifully crafted stories. We know our readers will enjoy it, especially his account of how he and Gloria got married.

COUGHING UP

I'm gonna do it (just as soon as I receive the first check from the proposed Notch Reform Legislation)! A "short-changed" member of the Social Security "notch" generation (not unlike most of you born between 1917-26), I'll send a check to the U.S. Treasury to pay for the "pilot error" damage (ground-fire and flak holes excluded) to Air Corps planes when I was the designated driver. I never scratched any paint or bent any metal...BUT, I did BREAK SOME GLASS! A student of the "3-R's", per my neuro-tronic "Rithmetic," it amounts to \$30.18....figured as follows:

THE FIRST MISADVENTURE: At Spanhoe (6 July, 1944, I think...after checking my Form 5) it was a warm, but marginal company-grade day to fly...broken cumulus clouds, a 2000 ft. base, maybe 2 to 3 miles visibility, not much action on the base; also, a long holiday week-end. Great planners, the "Brass" (including the "zebra NCOs) were no doubt, already aboard buses, trains or our "skytrain" shuttle, heading for the London "circus"....the famous theatrical juncture labeled "Piccadilly!" That meant that the 310th Squadron's Piper L-4J was not scheduled and could be flown.

A 30th Squadron buddy, Lawrence Tapper, was going TDY (Temporary Duty on an administrative assignment) and desperately needed a ride to Kettering where he was to catch a train or a bus? He knew of a rugby field not far from the depot...a landing strip. Few pilots ever get an opportunity to land on an English football field, soooo, a sucker for that kind of intrigue....AWAY WE WENT in the L-4...he, looking official in "Class A's" and carrying a briefcase....me, looking more like a soccer player in shorts and a T-shirt. Over the grassy field...only two or

three youngsters playing way off in a corner, we checked the local Holsteins windage stance (could have been Jerseys, I'm no longer certain) and landed at an angle sufficient to keep the goal nets in the periphery of the windscreen...no problem getting down and stopped. Larry leaped out, yelled "See ya," grinned, waved and ran off! The wind seemed negligible, So, doing a "180", I firewalled the fun-lever, heading (downwind) for the opposite end of the quiet, smooth playing field. The tail in the air, my blue eyes promptly focused on a low fence which quickly loomed higher and higher as the IAS (indicated air speed) needle SLOWLY, too, moved higher. Just before the decision-clock chimed, I eased down some flaps, counted to three and "ROTATED".....softly and firmly placing the stick against my gut...as I uttered a kind of end-zone prayer! With all body rhythms past the red-line, gratefully, my heart didn't burst and I cleared the fence! To this day, during morning ablutions, I still mark the lucky spot on my belly with an "X" from a "Speed Stick!" Some 310th pilots, Jim Drummey (Pan Am), Larry Tapper (FAA), L.M. Smith (Eastern), and others who "flew commercial" after the war would make this ROTATION procedure, "slightly modified", SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) in their giant, plush machines. Much later, the NFL (National Football League) players would adopt the "quicke" end zone prayer! At the time, I had no idea....paraphrasing Winston, that "so many would owe so much" to this former er, a....Spitfire pilot" (Sicily, remember) Touche!?!? AND I still didn't owe Uncle Sam a nickel.

BUUUT....back over Spanhoe, I noticed a squad of 310th troops erecting poles and a cross-rope for some glider (CG-4A) "snatch" practice in the grassy area between runway OB/26 and the woods. Curious, and wondering who was scheduled to fly the

26

mission (with an experienced NCO on the steel cable reel, such flights, some of you should remember, were always "fun"). The steel cable (about three times longer than the nylon tow rope) had to be "braked" with an experienced "touch". Once the pick-up arm was cranked down and the cable-end hook engaged on the cross-rope, the crew chief/brake operator became the critical link in the "snatch". Braked too loosely, the entire cable could unwind and drop off; braked too severely, the "jolt" might bust the tow rope, or yank the front end out of the glider. I'm no longer certain, but as I recall, the RO was positioned near the open doorway as an observer...controlling an emergency release lever. You could actually hear the shrill hum of the of the unwinding cable above the engine noise...assuming the props were synchronized. The good old days at Spanhoe!

I landed nearby, rapped briefly with the rope riggers....shortly taking aboard a non-rated line tech who wanted a "ride." The tower reporting "not traffic," I took off and climbed to around 1500 ft. (maybe 2000?)...then. nosing it down to gain some airspeed (the passenger [pestering for some aerobatics). I did three big, easy loops on an approach parallel to the runway to get the riggers to look up. THEY DID....just in time to see me scrape the left wing tip light cover on the runway as I crossed over after coming out of the last loop (it was not a visual misjudgment, but, much worse...a STALL...too much back pressure on the stick while in a steep bank....recovering from the "sink" just as the wing and ground met). PHEW! (Make that a TRIPLE PHEW!) My nerves and exuberance shattered, shaking...I landed immediately...quickly bumming a ride to my hut, then up the path to the Nissen latrine for a soothing, long, alternating (hot & cold shower, and a change of underwear...convinced again....that the "haloed Pilot in the White A-2 jacket" had no intention of letting me fly alone!

John Stewart, one of the Crew Chiefs in my "fan club." midnight-requisitioned and replaced the broken glass (red) lens and bulb.

Any Piper hanger would have sold me a set for \$16.25 in 1944. Maybe because I censored the Riggers mail, the miscue never got up to the the olde-man! INCIDENTALLY, reading other GI's mail was one nasty facet of WWII FOR WHICH WE WERE NOT FIGHTING. The "light".....shed from the varied "lamps" of the troops, I still recall, never revealed any military secrets...just simple, honest messages that the city lads, farm boys, former truck drivers, miners' kids and some career soldiers (collectively called the 310th Squadron) wanted only to go home (and tell war stories)!

THE SECOND INCIDENT: Those of you not in the 310th Squadron probably aren't aware that Gloria and I were married during the "Green Project". We had not seen each other for almost three years and NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO DATE! Gloria, sixteen, one of my high school friend's "little sister"....me, a macho Aviation Cadet (then 20)....during a leave before heading across the pond to MEATO (after getting my wings), I saw her once (when saying "so-long" to her brother) and got a good-bye hug and goodluck buss on the cheek when I left Shamokin humming "Yankee Doodle Dandy." While I'm amassing flying time in my Form 5 (Flight Log), Gloria finished high school and went off to college...Penn State, a freshman cheerleader for the Nittany Lions. She looked good in her Navy blue & white culottes and sweater (picture sent to me by her brother). I told her so in a V-Mail flimsy (remember those?)

This was just about the time those of us from the 62nd Troop Carrier Group transferred to the Isles...joining the 315th. Then, unlike Einstein (who futilely struggled to unify gravity and electro-magnetism...neither of us quite understanding why, the gravity and magnetism of our words unified over the Atlantic gap that separated us. Mysteriously, inexplicably, our dreams and hopes polarized. Letters...like the war, heated up!

VE Day and the "Green Project" put me in Miami from where I telephoned Gloria TWICE. The FIRST call, I asked her "to come down to Miami and marry me" She

responded: "My Dad would kill me!" After the SECOND call, having exchanged letters between calls), we agreed to rendezvous (and marry) at the old DeSoto Hotel in Savannah, Georgia on the morning of 14 July 1945 (Bastille Day); she, RUNNING AWAY from home and college (true grit this gal). I was to send her fifty bucks for train fare and whatever. I borrowed "20" from Lt. Walser who was flying co-pilot with me, double wrapped it with "30" from my new Moroccan goatskin wallet (didn't every one buy one on the ferry flights to Trinidad from the ETO?) and mailed her the money. Nervous and hopeful, WE BOTH SHOWED UP on the designated morning and before the day ended, we had purchased a set of gold bands, found a nearby random church (and minister), snagged four Minnesota tourists from the sidewalk (witnesses...their names and hometowns logged on our marriage certificate) and said our vows...two strangers embracing (sorta pawns bonded by absentee, war-time bliss)! THAT NIGHT I DID A STUPID THING!!! I phoned Lt. Walser, telling him to get one of the deadheading pilots and return with "our" plane to Borinquen Airbase (Puerto Rico)...I'd be along in A COUPLE OF DAYS.

He did as "ordered"...but, atypical of 2nd Looney lore, HE GOT CAUGHT! George Rylance, my OIC then, subjected him to a CIA type plea-bargain and got the "goods" on me. When I showed up, George, a former, strict, proud schoolmaster...smirked and sent me to the "blackboard"...my punishment (he might have wrecked my career at that time, but aware that I had flown a few more than my share of hours for the 315th, he decided to teach me a lesson). Hardly raising his voice, very calmly, the uniformed pedant spoke these words: "Ziggy, you're scheduled to fly in the morning...to Trinidad, Georgetown, Belem (South...away from Miami). That'll be your route for the foreseeable future." Weeks later (maybe a month or more...it seemed like a very long time), George finally relented, called me in for a "talk" and proffered a flight

to Miami. I was very anxious to join ranks with my bride...too anxious as it turned out!

Except for dodging a few of those massive Caribbean "cb's," (anvil-headed cumulo nimbis thunder bumpers) the trip to Florida's shores were routine. However, the "flagger" parked me in an area very close to where the unloading ramps, wheeled steps and maintenance stands, stood. Despite my best blue-eyed, double-doppler vision, the image that took shape in my retinas was slightly askew...dangled if I didn't hit the right wing tip on a stand (just busting the green lens, not even the bulb). Like "HST", I knew where the "buck" stopped and took full responsibility (mumbling that I had been victimized by a stupid flagger). In 1945 dollars, the cost was about \$12.42...thus, I now owed \$28.67, I thought. Thinking about the entire event now, I actually made money! I don't recall that I ever paid Lt. Walker the twenty bucks I had borrowed. Having celebrated our "50th" Gloria and I both agree that we'd do it again, but this time, Lt. Walker would be paid!

For you disbelievers, 310th aircrew members who witnessed me "getting" the RED (L-4) and GREEN (c-47) wing tip lens are still on Uncle Sam's rosters (you'll find them under "Medicare" and "Social Security." It kinda baffles me too, damaging all three tip-lights in separate mishapsalmost a "Believe It Or Not" for Ripley! Because of space limitations in our *Newsletter*, the FINAL MISHAP.....busting the WHITE tail light on an air-evac mission in a C-47.....Ed Papp and the "Haloed Command Pilot in the white A-2 Jacket"....WILCOING, will be in the next issue.....another unbelievable event, but absolutely true!

Gotta go. The President is going to address the Congress and my recycled Atwater-Kent radio takes time to warm up.

.....ziggy

Here, gentle readers, is yet another contribution from Ziggy -- this one stimulated by a previous story carried in the February issue of the 315th Newsletter.

OPEN W....I.....D.....E

Sandy Friedman's amusing story on the "bite" (Feb. '96 Newsletter), brought back still another memory of "life" at Spanhoe. Like Sandy, I, too, was gifted with what "George" (my dentist, not the autopilot) calls a "marked overbite" (upper front teeth biting forward...."buck teeth" to the insensitive). It was interesting to note that I could not have loaded a musket (unable, per Sandy, to tear the paper powder tube with my teeth).....therefore not qualifying for duty during the "musket wars". That's the good news.

The bad news....Sandy's war story lit up a dusty panel on my cerebral monitor. Maybe most of you will also remember our "FIELD DAY" Exercise (I only recall one such event at Spanhoe)....when, we "reported" to the First Sergeant (the Brass standing around observing) with rucksack, gas mask, mess kit and other equipment needed by Air Corps types to survive in-the-field!

Each of us had to "find" a buddy with a shelter half, thus, enabling "the team" to button together a "pup" tent for two. We also learned to quench our thirst from a Lister Bag after digging shallow slit trenches with the folding shovels we strapped to our back packs. The Spam served by the field kitchen was quickly devoured by the hungry troops; and we cleaned the mess kits by dipping them in a tank of hot water...among other things.!

For me, the MAIN EVENT probably involved our band leader and Group Dentist (I don't recall a 310th dentist) Joe Shulman.....who, with me as a victim (patient) filled a small cavity using the special field dental chair that did not require electricity. THE DRILL WAS PEDAL-POWERED! The "power" was provided by an assistant (not the dentist)....and the drill speed set by the peddler's cadence. My old buddies...possibly Len Thomas & Pap Stewart, maybe Bob Sutton and Don Glover, (I really can't remember)....but holding both arms, I was volunteered. (I did have a cavity.)

I learned two things from the "demonstration": FIRST, never NEVER give cause to the PEDDLER to stop while the dentist is drilling. SECOND...make sure you're away on a "flight" whenever Field Day exercises are planned.

Gotta go....time to crank up my INTERPLAK (electric toothbrush). Joe's filling long ago replaced with a crown that I shine twice daily.

ziggy

From time to time, we get some interesting letters along with material to be considered for the 315th Newsletter. Such a letter, together with a story for the publication was received in December last year from George Waldron. In his letter, George told of his progress through the armed forces beginning with a stint in the 45th Division, a short tour in Panama and to pilot training in 1942. After it was established George would do better in some other specialty, he was sent to Scott Field and radio operator's training. Finally winding up in the 34th squadron as a qualified radio operator, George had some interesting experiences. One of them is detailed below.

Perhaps some of the 315th guys will recall this mission. It was 1945 and near the end of the war. A flight of five -- possibly seven C-47s left Amiens-Glissy headed for Germany. Our mission was to pick up and evacuate rapatriated prisoners of war. Due to low clouds and getting rather late in the afternoon, the flight landed at a grassy landing strip on the outskirts of Kassel, Germany. Evidently the pilot in command of the flight had been in communication with Allied Forces Network stationed at a former Wermacht barracks near Kassel. On hand to meet us was Tech Sgt. Broderick Crawford, the movie actor. He, with drivers for several weapons carriers, transported us to the barracks. A few unlucky crewmen were designated to stay with the aircraft as guards. My pilot, at first, told me I was to remain. However, I succeeded in talking him into letting me go along to the barracks. (He may have been 1st Lt. St. John). When we arrived at the barracks we were made welcome by the officer in charge. Our gear was left in the headquarters building near the barracks. Quite a few of the men went exploring the area. There was a huge two or three story barracks. Near the entrance gate was a small building. The basement had a cell block of two or three cells. The floors were strewn with straw. The other area had been a machine shop. A goodly number of rifles were lying around. Unfortunately they were damaged. The German soldiers had grasped some rifles by the stock and bent the barrels some way. Others had the stocks shattered. Had I used my head, I could have taken one of each and attached a good barrel and receiver to a good stock. I did pick up perhaps five

"coal scuttle". When I returned "home" to Glissy I sold them to the ground personnel.

While scrounging through the piles of debris that had been pitched out of the windows of the barracks by earlier "inhabitants", there on the top was a new Mauser carbine! The stock was not varnished and looked unfinished. I had hardly had time to inspect it when Lt. St. John exclaimed "I've been trying to get my hands on one of those! I'd give my left (censored) to have that! Without a moment's hesitation I handed my prize to him. I remarked "Here, I'll find me another! " I wasn't "brown-nosing". I admired Lt. St. John. He was my pilot on the Rhine drop. But that's another story.

Meanwhile, "back at the farm", TSgt. Broderick Crawford rounded up 2 or 3 or our bunch and with one or two weapons carriers took off for a warehouse somewhere in Kassel. He brought back several cases of Cognac. The labels originally were French. When the Germans confiscated the booze, they stamped across the labels in red ink "Fur das Wermacht"

At least one bottle was distributed to each of our group who wanted it. Later, after we had dinner, Crawford passed the word that if anyone wanted to meet some German women, he would "introduce" us. He took us through a huge hole in a fence separating the barracks compound and a large apartment complex. Crawford was the same in real life as he was in "reel" life. A loud, blustering, "take charge" character. I've often wondered who really was in charge at that Allied Forces Network Station.

I asked him for his autograph on my "short snorter" roll. Did I have any German

money, he asked. "No." "You gawdamn guys are always asking for an autograph and you don't have any gawdamn money! I promptly offered him French francs. "Naw, that's okay." I learned later why Broderick Crawford was being so hospitable. He wanted a ride to Paris--by a roundabout way. He would fly with our bunch to the former prisoners' pick-up, then to LeHavre, our destination. The prisoners (ex) were to be returned to the United States on a troop ship as those of us of the 315th did later on the U.S.S. General Gordon. But, that too, is another story.

Crawford took a group of us over to the civilian quarters. He rapped on the outside door. Not getting any response, he took his .45 pistol out of its holster and "whapped" the door a few licks. All this time in that gravelly voice "Open up Gawdammit!" Eventually the door was opened. Crawford told us to go on in. I asked him if he was coming too. "Naw, I'm married. You guys go ahead". Since I don't intend to edit this narration, I should add a note regarding Crawford's autograph. He furnished a 10 Mark Invasion Currency bill and signed it. He declined repayment in French money. The bill he gave me was added to my short snorter roll.

The women in the apartment were wives and no doubt many were widows of the Wermacht. One of the lads had visited Germany as a child. Visited his grandparents. He spoke fluent German. The women who conversed with him could tell by his accent exactly where his grandparents had lived! I guess it's like here in the States. One can recognize the various regional dialects and accents.

After sharing our Cognac with our hostesses, "pairing off was done. One guy had been hitting his bottle quite heavily. In fact he drank all his Cognac. He didn't fraternize. So by "bedtime"-- or sooner, he was in Lullabye Land---Zonked, Kaput. Two of the ladies lined up five kitchen chairs and a couple of guys picked up the "corpse" and stretched him across the chairs on his back. The women spread a comforter over him and "tucked him

in" for the night. He must have slept soundly. Next morning he was still in the "prone" position...had not moved.

The next day out at the air strip we waited quite some time. During the wait several fellows played poker at the back of my plane. Lt. St. John was showing off his Mauser rifle. Someone produced a box of shells. I should say cartridges. They differed from conventional ones in that the bullet was wooden! Dum-dums that would splinter when they struck a person. We each took turns firing the rifle out the door of the C-47 parked on the ground.

We flew on into Germany to the field where the prisoners were waiting for evacuation. They were loaded into the planes. A pitiful sight. Those who had been held the longest were gaunt and haggard. Some we helped up the ladder. All the so-called research on obesity due to genes, glandular abnormalities, etc. ad nauseam. Bull! You'll never see a fat person in a prisoner-of-war camp!

As the loose Vee formation of 5 or 7 planes was flying to LeHavre Lt. S. John occupied the co-pilot's seat. I was sitting in the pilot's seat. (Editor's note: George had 13 hrs. 59 minutes flying time in PT-17s while he was in cadet training!) The co-pilot was in back, talking with the former POWs. Our Chaplain was seated on parachutes in the well behind the co-pilot. (It may have been Garth Esplin as co-pilot on that trip. I don't recall.)

We were flying down a rather broad valley. Lt. St. John had let me handle the controls for perhaps half an hour. He noticed the distance was widening between our plane and the lead plane. He said he would take over and "catch up" St. John advanced the throttles a bit and we were closing the gap when I noted the lead plane suddenly dropped a few hundred(?) feet. Perhaps 50-100? I made a mental note when we reach that "spot" we will do the same. And did we ever! I found myself floating -- "zero-gravity" -- the top of my head pushing against the ceiling. And, stupid me, I had failed to fasten the seat

belt. Thank goodness St. John had his seat belt fastened. Our Chaplain received a gashed forehead, the result of an unsecured Very Pistol that had been on top of the radio tuning units cabinet across from the storage well. I had previously loaded the pistol with the "colors of the day" and laid the pistol on the tuning cabinet instead of putting it back in its harness on the aisle side of the cabinet. "Mea culpa," Padre. My apologies again, 50 years later.

Our poor passengers took a beating also. Many sustained cuts and bruises requiring bandages from our First Aid Kits. I tended the Padre's wound. He had grabbed the nearest rag -- a greasy one the Crew Chief had used. Blood was trickling through the Chaplain's fingers. A nasty whack.

We landed at the LeHavre airfield. The former POWs left the planes and, according to their physical condition, were taken to ambulances or trucks to the dock. Broderick Crawford caught a train to Paris. Should anyone care to do so, you can write to me. I will answer your letters.

George Waldron
3321 Marmary Lane
St. Ann MO 63074-3505
Tel: (314) 429-0805

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Here is a story sent by one of our "newest" correspondents, Chuck Lovett. His title is a fascinating one, worthy of the great short story writer, O. Henry. We think you will enjoy reading Chuck's latest contribution to the *Newsletter*.

THE GIRL ON THE BUS

Before going overseas, I had most of my transition training in C-47s at Grenada Mississippi. Grenada was a very small town and there wasn't much to do there whenever we had some time off. The nearest towns of any size were Memphis, Tennessee, about 80 miles north of Grenada, and Jackson, Mississippi, about 100 miles south. Whenever

I had some time off I'd head for Memphis. After one such trip I hopped on the bus for the return trip to Grenada and was pleasantly surprised to find myself seated next to a very pretty (southern type) girl. We struck up a conversation and seemed to hit it off pretty well. Just before we got to Grenada we exchanged names and addresses and she suggested that I drop her a line after my arrival at my overseas destination, which was to be in a month or so. I got off the bus at Grenada and she continued on to her destination which, I believe, was Jackson.

A month or so later, after arriving at Spanhoe, I wrote her a letter in which I described our Nissen Hut and casually mentioned that one of the fellows I was quartered with was from her home town of Memphis. In the months that followed we wrote each other several times.

On Sept. 21, 1944, the 315th was scheduled to fly Polish paratroopers to a drop zone near Driel, on the outskirts of Arnhem. This was a particularly rough mission. Five of our planes were shot down and many others damaged necessitating forced landings at various locations. One of those planes shot down was piloted by Cecil Dawkins. Despite being wounded, he had managed to drop his paratroopers on the drop zone, but because his plane was on fire and going down, he ordered his crew to bail out. They all bailed out successfully, but Dawkins was not seen to leave the plane and, after it exploded and crashed, it was presumed that Dawkins had not survived. On the squadron roster he was listed as "missing in action."


It was perhaps two weeks later that I received a letter from the girl I had met on the bus. She enclosed two clippings from a Memphis newspaper. The first was a short paragraph reporting that Cecil Dawkins had been shot down and was missing in action. *The amazing thing about it was that, although I had mentioned that one of fellows in our Nissen Hut was from Memphis, I didn't remember telling her his name -- Cecil Dawkins.* But, even more amazing, the second newspaper clipping reported that Cecil

Dawkins was alive and now a German prisoner of war. I checked with the people at both Squadron headquarters and Group headquarters. Nobody was aware that Dawkins had survived the crash and was then a POW. The two newspaper clippings were tacked up on the Squadron bulletin board. I later retrieved the clippings and still have them today.

Today I can't remember her name, but I always thought it a strange happenstance of fate that, because of my meeting a girl on a bus somewhere in Mississippi, we in the 315th first learned of Dawkins' fate. Presumably, the official notification eventually reached the 315th, but the first word came from that girl on the bus.

(Editor's note: Chuck appended the clippings to his story and we reproduce them herewith.)

LT. DAWKINS MISSING
 Lt. Cecil H. Dawkins, Memphis AAF pilot who flew Martha Raye and Mitzi Mayfair from Casablanca to Algiers for USO camp shows, has been missing since action over Holland Sept. 21, the War Department has notified his sister, Mrs. W. R. Betty, 620 Pearce.



Son of Mrs. J. W. Brown, Hattiesburg, Miss., and the late Earl D. Dawkins, the young lieutenant joined the AAF in 1940 after attending South Side High. He won his wings at Brady, Texas, was soon sent to North Africa and on to England to participate in D-Day operations over France.

For more than a year Lt. Dawkins has bought a \$100 war bond monthly.

This is the first clipping sent to Chuck

CECIL DAWKINS NOW REPORTED CAPTURED

Lost in Holland Sept. 21, Says War Department

Lt. Cecil H. Dawkins, Memphis AAF pilot who was reported yesterday as missing since action over Holland Sept. 21, is now known to be a German prisoner, the War Department has notified his sister, Mrs. W. R. Betty, 620 Pearce.

In the AAF since 1940 after attending Tech High, the young lieutenant flew Martha Raye and Mitzi Mayfair from Casablanca to Algiers for USO camp shows. He was sent to North Africa soon after winning his wings at Brady, Texas, and then on to England to participate in D-Day operation in France.

His mother, Mrs. J. W. Brown, lives at Hattiesburg, Miss.

This is the second clipping

WITH DEEP REGRET, WE RECORD THE DEATH OF THESE COMRADES AND A 315TH LADY

Robert Barnes
James W. Boddie

Sam Bryan Oct. 22, 1995
Arthur DeWolfe July 11, 1995
Duncan S. Hatton Jan. 6, 1996
Kenneth King June 19, 1995
Lawrence Witherington April 29, 1995
Joy (Mrs. Steve) Bolling May 28, 1996

May 24, 1996

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Effective this date, Joseph E. Krysakowski, 12 Rivers Ct. Lady's Is., Beaufort SC 29902 is appointed Acting Treasurer, World War II 315th Troop Carrier Group Association U.S.A.A.F., to assume and execute the full duties of Treasurer pending the Association's next formal election of officers and directors.

Also effective this date, Maurice F. Dean is appointed Acting Assistant Treasurer.

(Signed) J.S. Smith, President
World War II 315th Troop Carrier Group Association
(acting for the Board of Directors)

NOW READ THIS. IT'S IMPORTANT!!!

IT'S GETTING CLOSER!! OUR 1996 REUNION IN MILWAUKEE IS A LITTLE MORE THAN TWO MONTHS AWAY, SO PLEASE DON'T DELAY ANOTHER DAY BEFORE SENDING IN YOUR REGISTRATION FORM AND HOTEL RESERVATION. ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE YOU WILL FIND PAGES OF INFORMATION ABOUT WHERE WE'LL BE STAYING, AND WHAT WE'LL BE DOING DURING THE FOUR DAYS (SEPT. 5-8) OF THE MEETING. AS INDICATED, SEND THE REGISTRATION FORM PLUS YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO ARMED FORCES REUNIONS, INC. TO THE ADDRESS SHOWN AT THE TOP OF THE REGISTRATION FORM. MAIL THE HOTEL RESERVATION FORM DIRECT TO THE HYATT REGENCY MILWAUKEE HOTEL AT 333 WEST KILBOURN AVENUE, MILWAUKEE WI 53203.

WE'VE JUST BEEN ADVISED THAT WE WILL BE GIVEN A SPECIAL RATE FOR CAR OR RV PARKING IN THE HOTEL'S FACILITY OF \$5.00 PER DAY WHICH WILL BE BILLED DIRECTLY TO EACH INDIVIDUAL. IF YOU PLAN TO USE THE HOTEL PARKING FACILITY, PLEASE ADVISE AT REGISTRATION AND YOU WILL BE GIVEN A TAG IDENTIFYING YOU AS THE HOLDER OF THE SPECIAL PARKING RATE.