

**THE ROYALTY OF THE  
315th TROOP CARRIER GROUP**

**Article by Robert L. Cloer, Pilot, 34th TCS**

A 21-year-old Edward S. Fulmer joined the US Army Air Corps from his hometown of East Syracuse, New York. He dreamed of becoming an airline pilot. Despite having a civilian pilot's license, he was not accepted as an aviation cadet for lack of college credits.

In late 1942 there was a call for glider pilots, and Ed Fulmer was accepted. Fulmer completed his training at the glider school in Stuttgart, Arkansas, in 1943. At this point there was a glut of glider pilots, and as he already had a civilian pilot's license, Fulmer was told that he would have to go for training as a power pilot, or be reassigned to a non-flying occupation.

After completing flight school and troop carrier transition school, Fulmer was shipped overseas. Arriving in England in March 1944, he was assigned to the 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron, 315th Troop Carrier Group, based at Spanhoe.

Spending many hours as a co-pilot, Fulmer got into the routine of troop carrier operations as the group prepared for the forthcoming invasion of the European continent. Fulmer remembers: "We went through D-day without a scratch."

Taking off at 1039 on the morning of September 17, the 43rd formed Serial A-II together with the 34th Troop Carrier Squadron. The drop was on both sides of the Grave Bridge over the Maas River. The objective was taken quickly by the American paratroopers. In the cockpit of the plane piloted by 1st Lieutenant James Spurrier, co-pilot 2nd Lieutenant Edward S. Fulmer noticed that they had used an alarming amount of fuel. Reaching Spanhoe, they discovered that the aircraft had been hit by small arms fire, severing a fuel line. The aircraft was pulled out of the line for repairs. For the mission on the following day, Spurrier and Fulmer, along with radio operator Corporal William T. Hollis, were assigned to the aircraft whose crew chief was Corporal Russell Smith.

The 315th was teamed with the neighboring 314th Troop Carrier Group in a scheduled drop of the 4th Parachute Brigade on DZ "Y" near Ginkel Heath. The British paratroopers arrived early in the morning, but the

scheduled takeoff was delayed for hours as they waited for the fog and overcast to clear.

Waiting near C-47 43-16032 was chalk number 697. This was a 16-man platoon of B Company, 10 Para, commanded by Sergeant Albert E. Spring. After attaching the supply containers under the C-47, there was little to do but wait. The platoon had been together for a long time, and respected their platoon sergeant, who was bright, energetic, demanding, but very fair.

Sergeant Spring grew up near the village of Winwick, Huntingdonshire. Life was not easy. There were times that Albert engaged in poaching to help the family make ends meet. Leaving school to work as a farmhand at the; age of fourteen, Spring later enlisted in the famous Black Watch Regiment. He went overseas with No. 11 (Scottish) Commando, and saw action in Syria. Later serving with 1st SAS, Spring became part of the cadre for the newly formed 10th Parachute Battalion of General Hackett's 4th Parachute Brigade.

At 1100, it appeared that the sky would clear enough to permit takeoff and the paratroopers boarded the plane. This would be their first combat parachute jump. The first aircraft of Serial A-33 started rolling down the runway 25 minutes later. It was composed of 27 C-47s of the 34th and 43rd Troop Carrier Squadrons.

The formation circled over Boston, Lincolnshire while they waited for the other 315th formation, Serial A-34, of the 309th and 310th Troop Carrier Squadrons, to form up behind them.

Already several hours behind the scheduled drop, the two 315th serials flew behind the 72 C-47s of the 314th Troop Carrier Group which composed Serials A-31 and A-32. The flight across the Channel was uneventful, and the 4th Para Brigade's lift crossed the Dutch coast at Schouwen Island.

Within a few minutes, the formation made a turn to the northeast reaching their IP at 1401 hours. From now on, the formation was bearing down on their drop zone. Aircraft were forbidden to take any evasive action. In the troop compartment, the red light went on, and the paratroopers stood up and made their final preparations for the jump.

In a minute, the formation was passing s'Hertogenbusch and its rail yards. They were heavily defended by anti-aircraft, and the crews, alerted less than two minutes before by the passage of the 314th serials, gave the 315th a warm welcome.

Spurrier's C-47 was flying on the right wing of the 43rd Squadron's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Otto H. Peterson. Sitting in the right seat co-pilot Fulmer watched as a plane from the 34th Squadron ahead, hit by flak burst into flames. Tensing up in his seat, Fulmer thought that his plane would be next. As the thought was flashing through his mind, light flak started ripping through the starboard wing, and worked its way toward the fuselage. The starboard engine caught fire, and then a flak burst exploded in the navigation compartment. Lieutenant Fulmer was torn by shrapnel up and down his leg and back.

What Ed Fulmer remembers of the events of the next minute have, understandably come to him over the years, most frequently in bad dreams an incident that would profoundly change his life, and for many years was one that he tried to forget. Looking over to the left seat, He saw Lieutenant Spurrier slumped, either dead or unconscious. A millisecond later, the 100 octane aviation gas from the fuel tank below and slightly behind him turned the cockpit into an inferno, searing Fulmer's face, hands, neck and shoulders.

Sergeant Spring, who was standing near the door, watched as the jump light disappeared in front of him, replaced by a jagged hole in the fuselage. He reached for the handle to release the containers slung below, and a piece of flak tore that off the wall.

Other planes in the formation saw the C-47 with engine burning and cockpit engulfed in flames. They watched it pullout of the formation lest it explode and damage any other aircraft. The paratroopers had started jumping, but as the plane struggled to level itself, they fell to the floor in a jumble of arms, legs and static lines. As they struggled to untangle themselves, Corporal Smith stayed calm and tried to get them to the door and safety. Private James Westbury can still remember the "colorful American profanities coming from the crew chief's mouth in his soft Tennessee drawl."

The stricken C-47 flew north of the Waal River as the paratroopers floated to earth in a farm field. The parachutes of paratrooper Penwill and radio operator Hollis did not open. Both were shredded by flak. The two were killed when they hit the ground. Corporal Smith pulled his ripcord as he left the door. Jumping last from a very low altitude, the chute opened as Smith hit the ground. His ankle badly injured, he watched as the burning plane tried to land in the open farmland. Nearing the ground, the wing struck a power line tower, and the C-

47 plowed into the ground.

### **Corporal Russell M Smith**

#### **Radio Operator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron**

At about 1415 hours I realized that our plane had been hit somewhere in the right wing and cockpit. The paratroopers were standing in jump position. The radio operator opened the door leading to the cockpit and I could see there was a fire up front and although I was on the interphone and had no orders, nor had the jump light come on, I ordered the paratroopers to jump.

There was some confusion while these men were jumping as one trooper got his foot fouled in the lines. Before they were all out, we had been hit numerous times by small arms and flak, and we were rapidly losing altitude, ordered the radio operator to jump and followed. I opened my chute as I left the door. The chute opened just as I hit the ground I injured my ankle and foot in the jump. [saw the plane burning fiercely about 200 feet from me. went to the radio operator, who was lying face down near me. Blood was rushing from his nose, mouth and ears. Civilians had gathered and a doctor was called. They showed me a place to hide until nightfall, at which time I was taken to a home where I stayed for the rest of the night.

### **Sergeant Alfred E. Spring**

#### **B Company, 10th Parachute Battalion**

When we were hit by flak for the second time, it was obvious that we were in trouble because the plane's nose went down and we all slid forward and away from the exit door. Then Corporal Smith got the door to the pilots compartment open and flames came through the doorway, and of course, a lot of smoke as well. The corporal shouted "get out, get the hell out." Then suddenly the plane came back on a fairly level keel and we were able to get ourselves up and out the door in our correct order. We were about 150 feet above the ground at this time, but it was get out or burn.

### **2nd Lieutenant Edward S. Fulmer**

#### **Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron**

We had a group of British paratroopers and supplies on board for the area to the west of Arnhem. We left Spanhoe at 1130, and at 1402 we had our first contact with anti-aircraft. I was in charge of the aircraft while Spurrier was trying to talk to the crew chief over the intercom. Spurrier was hit almost immediately and I saw a lot of

smoke and flames in the cockpit. [held the aircraft level so the paras could jump while I pulled it out of the formation. Then I let the nose down for a crash landing. The smoke and flames almost blinded me, and I could not see the ground because of the pain. I pulled on the cord of my life vest and threw it away. I was dizzy from the fire and shock. Finally they were on the ground, and the aircraft flamed up and I tried to get out through the overhead escape hatch This did not work, and I opened the side window, but I still don 't know how got out.

Watching all this nearby, a Dutch farmer, Mr. H. Willemsen, saw the burning plane skid across the field, the white supply containers being torn from below and scattered. Lieutenant Fulmer tried to open the escape hatch above him, but his burned hands could not manage. The Dutchman watched as the starboard side window opened, and a figure wiggled out of the smoke and flames headfirst, and dropped to the ground. Somehow Fulmer was able to make his way across an open field toward a canal with an orchard beyond before collapsing. Grabbing a bucket of water, Willemsen continued to pour it on the unconscious figure even after his burning clothing was no longer smoking. The farmer and his two sons carried Fulmer to the cove of some trees. They later took him to a doctor for first aid, and then to the villa De Snellberg where he remained for six days.

#### **Sergeant Albert E. Spring** **H Company, 10th Parachute Battalion**

After we landed we found one of my men was dying. His chute pulled out, but failed to fill properly. We gave him a morphine injection because he was writhing and moaning as though he was in great pain, before - I would say about ten minutes - he died. We had been joined by three Dutchmen, and we hid his body. One of the Dutchmen could speak English and he told us that if the Germans did not find him, they would collect the body later. This they did and I watched him being buried from a distance a couple of days later. The soldier who died was 83820 Private A. W. Penwill.

When evening fell the underground took other wounded somewhere else, and the men who could still fight were lodged into the farmhouse "De Hazehof" in Kesteren.

#### **Private Fred Bramley** **B Company, 10th Parachute Battalion**

If it were not for Ed Fulmer, I would not be talking to you. Sergeant Spring was in charge. His first instructions were for everybody to behave, and not to run off. The Dutch spoke English. We were in a field of high corn. We sheltered there for the night.

#### **Sergeant Albert E. Spring** **B Company, 10th Parachute Battalion**

We were requested by the underground not to do any fighting to prevent reprisals from the Germans in the neighborhood. I asked them to contact the Allies in Nijmegen, and try to get us there. The cellar was full of food. The family De Haas, who were keeping us, had butchered a cow a few days before and the illegal meat was sitting there in the cellar. There were also potatoes and fruit jam. We pushed the furniture against the windows, and turned the farm house into a defense point if it became necessary to fight.

While Fulmer was nursed in the Zeilstra's family house, their daughter Nelly played outside, and had the responsibility of giving the warning if any Germans were around. The lieutenant was moved somewhere else as quickly as possible. Dr. van Empel covered Fulmer with salve and then wrapped him like a mummy.

#### **2nd Lieutenant Edward S. Fulmer** **Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron**

I lost consciousness after impact. I was coming to, but not long enough to know too much of anything. Every time I came to, even if it was for a few seconds, there was always somebody sitting next to my bed. I did not know whether it was night or day. It was dark there, they kept the curtains closed. This of course was, under the noses of the Germans.

Dr. van Empel and his wife, who was a nurse, doctored and bandaged Fulmer and no doubt saved his life. They, along with many of the people from the village of Opheusden risked their lives over the next two weeks to take care of Fulmer. If any of them had been caught they would have been shot by the Germans. There was even a small boy that was always playing in the front yard - he was the lookout!

Dr. van Empel covered Fulmer with some kind of medicine and then wrapped him like a mummy from the top of his head to his waist. The pain was so bad

from his burns that he did not know about all of his other problems. Both of his wrists were broken, his knees had been jammed, his spine had been damaged, and four of his front teeth knocked out. His nose and left eye had been damaged. He had a large cut on his face. Other than that, he was in very good shape. Dr. van Empel, his wife, or some of the town people were with Ed at all time to feed him and take care of his bodily needs

One day everybody received a big scare when there was a knock on the door and in came two men dressed in civilian clothes. Everybody thought that they were members of the Gestapo. They turned out to be Sergeant Albert E. Spring and one of the other men of B company who had been able to jump from the plane. Fulmer regained consciousness as they sat by his bed. Fulmer later said that was the first time he had ever seen an Englishman cry. Sergeant Spring wanted to thank Lieutenant Fulmer for keeping the plane in the air long enough for his men to be able to get out of the aircraft. The Dutch Underground had been helping them also. Lieutenant Fulmer told Dr. van Empel that the visit from Sergeant Spring did him more good than the doctor's medicine.

### **Sergeant Albert E. Spring**

#### **B Company, 10th Parachute Battalion**

When you stated that I and another member of my unit visited the badly burned Lieutenant Edward S. Fulmer on the 20th of September, this to was. understandably not quite correct. It was of course myself and a member of the Dutch underground. Of course, for that other person's safety at that time, I said that he was one of our men. That gallant Dutchman was Hans Key, and at that time I was the only one among many who knew his name. This was for his safety of course because in the event of any of us falling into German hands then he could not have been given away. You are fully aware that if he had been caught he was, a dead man without a trial as of course as I would have been if caught in civilian clothes.

We his in the area for a total of five days and nights and the Dutch kept us informed about the situation of our comrades in and around Arnhem. After a short time, it was obvious that it was useless for us to try to join them. We decided to try to get out to do this we could only move at night so I had the civilian suit in the day to make a reconnaissance of the ground we hoped to travel through at night.

### **Ham Born**

Two days later the Germans came in strength into the area, and spread out.

They came to de Hazehof. This was a naturally a very large problem, but it was almost played out as a comedy. The head of the underground told them that his daughter had died during the evening, and that the home had been declared quarantined, and that the doctor would not allow anybody in or out. The Germans were really afraid of catching any diseases, and left very hastily.

In a letter written to Fulmer after the war, Dr. van Empel said, "I was astonished that you, with all of your serious wounds, were able to shake hands with all of those persons who came to welcome you. Most of them could not speak English and you, with your fingers, would give them the V sign. It was rather dangerous in our village just then because there were still some Jerries and the allied forces were still 60 miles away. We closed the shutters and pretended that you had disappeared. We told the people in the village that the paratroopers had taken you away. When the first English tanks appeared, I told their commander where you were. By radio he called for an ambulance and that night they took you away."

Fulmer was taken to a battlefield hospital, which turned out to be an open tent in the war zone. His stretcher was placed on the ground near an open fire to keep him warm. The British doctor took off a little bit of his bandages to take a look and said, "Hell, I can't do anything more for you here" and sent him to an old school house that was being used as a field hospital. After Ed got there the Germans cut the corridor and the Allies in Nijmegen were isolated three days. On the morning of the fourth day, it was announced that they had opened a 10 mile gap in the lines and any who were able to travel would be taken out. While Fulmer was in no shape to travel, he asked to go. He was taken along, but before he passed out again before reaching Brussels. Thinking that he was dying, they left him at a Catholic Hospital in Brussels. The sisters doctored him and changed the bandages and after a few days he was taken to the Brussels Airport and air-evacuated by the British to England.

At the hospital in England they operated on his mouth and face and let him recuperate until December of 1944, when he was air evacuated to the States, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on February 23, 1945. After hospital stays at Selma, Barnsdale, and San Antonio, Fulmer was medically retired from the Air Force as a 1st Lieutenant in September of 1945

In 1947 Ed Fulmer was called to Washington, D.C. to appear at the Dutch Embassy. At that time he was to become one of the very few Americans who had ever been made a "Knight of the Military Order of William." This is one of Holland's highest honors and as a rule is a medal that is presented only to Dutch citizens for exceptional acts of bravery, and in most cases posthumously. He was knighted by Queen Wilhelmina.

Early in 1948 Fulmer received a letter from Mr. Willemsen from Opheusden, asking about his condition after all of the burns and wounds he had suffered. Shortly after that he received a letter from Dr. van Empel. From correspondence with these two men Ed learned what had happened to the village of Opheusden shortly after the British evacuated him. All of the people were forced to leave the area and not allowed to return for ten months. When they did return, they found that just about all of their homes had been destroyed or burnt to the ground.

The battles in the area had gone back and forth with the village changing hands five times before the Allies finally had to withdraw. Fulmer learned that the people in the area had no clothes, blankets, food, or the other things needed in daily life. With the help of the American Legion and other veterans' organizations in the Syracuse area, Ed organized their own care package program. This was on a large scale, with some of the shipments as large as 2000 lbs. This was done not just once, but as often as possible. Dr. van Empel distributed the shipments as they were received in Opheusden. He wrote to Ed; "This is a great cause of joy to us all." Ed said that he would not be alive today if it were not for these great people who all risk their lives for him and he felt that it was the least he could do.

### **Edward S. Fulmer**

At that time I belonged to the American Legion in Syracuse. The group, we sent a pile of clothes to Opheusden. They were really desperate then. We shipped an enormous amount of clothing and blankets there. We got a lot of nice letter. In return. I have to laugh, the two boys that carried me were from a family of thirteen. I sent the Willemsens a bigfruit cake ... something to eat besides blankets, and clothes. Boy, what a letter I got back, and afterwards I thought that fruitcake couldn't have gone for with 13 in the family. They were overjoyed. because that didn't have anything at the time.

In March of 1965, former Lieutenant Edward S.

Fulmer received an invitation to be a guest of Her Majesty Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, his Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, and the Knights of the Military Order of William. It was to be the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Order. Shortly after he accepted the invitation, Fulmer received his airline tickets, hotel reservations, and a program of events. Fulmer flew from Syracuse to JFK Airport. He had no more than stepped off the plane when he was paged and a limousine was waiting to take him to the KLM terminal. VIP treatment all the way, as only the Dutch know how.

Placed on board the plane before any of the other passengers and after takeoff, the pilot asked him to come up front for some drinks. After that, it was champagne all the way. Arriving in Holland, they were met by soldiers with staff cars. Baggage was all taken care of and they were driven to their hotel. There was a very impressive military parade to honor the Knights. The Queen reviewed the parade from a portable throne, with the Knights standing on each side. After the parade, all went to the Hall of Knights for cocktails and luncheon hosted by Prince Bernard. Fulmer said that the Prince was the life of the party, and a real regular fellow, and made everybody feel right at home.

One of the highlights of the trip, after all of these years, was to be able to meet with the man who had saved his life back in 1944. Fulmer stayed at Dr. van Empel's home just outside of Amsterdam for three days. They had been corresponding regularly since 1948, and had a lot of things to catch up on. Dr. van Empel took Ed to many places of interest but he just could not make himself go back to visit Opheusden, where James Spurrier and William Hollis had been killed.

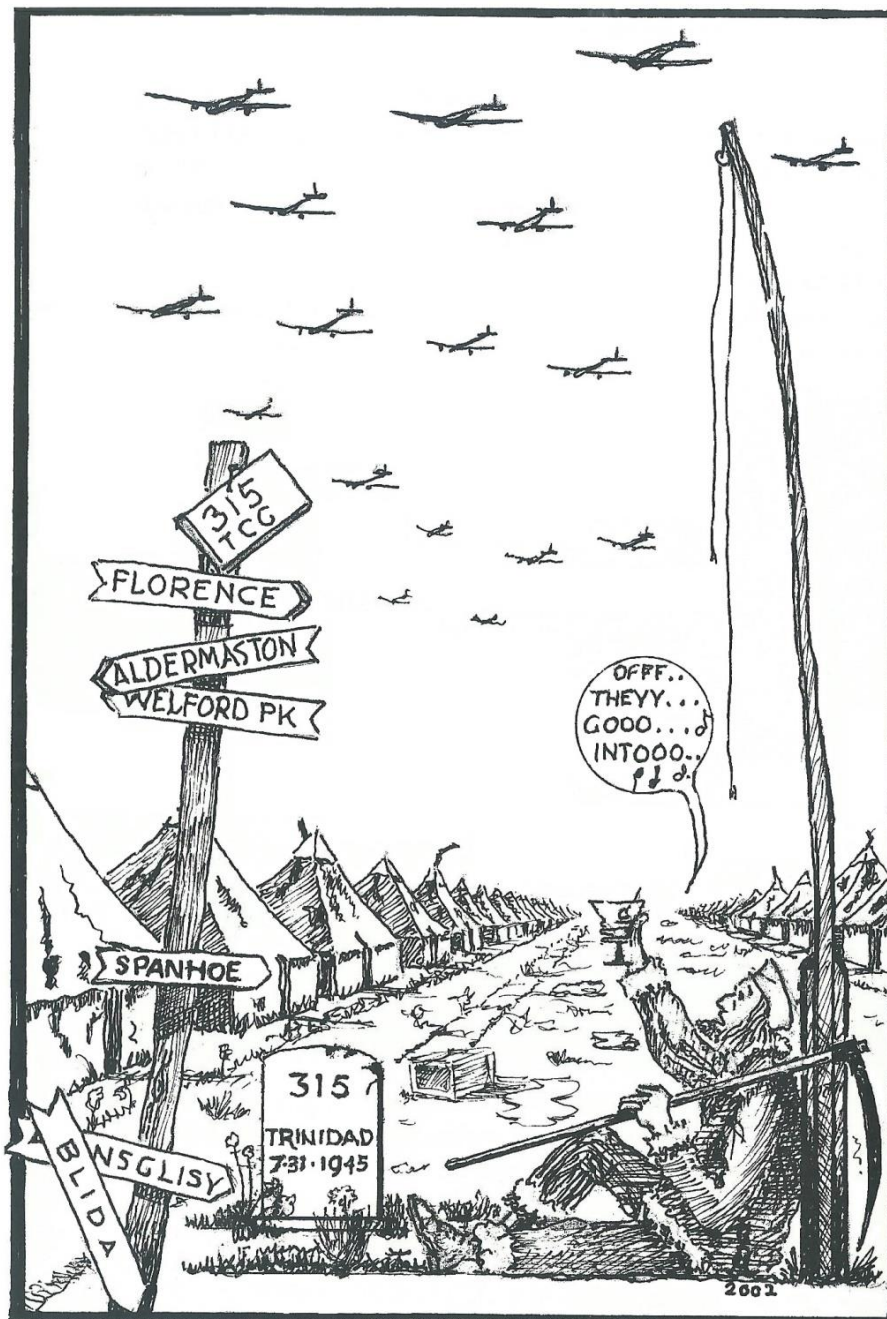
Meanwhile, Bob Cloer, the longtime recording secretary of the 315th Troop Carrier Group Association, would not be still. Through an old friend and honorary member of the organization, Captain James Flavell, a former British paratrooper, the men of B Company, 10th Parachute Battalion who were on Fulmer's plane that day were located.

Further efforts on Cloer's account also located Russell Smith, the crew chief, who was still working on aircraft for American Airlines. In 1987 Smith laid eyes on Fulmer for the first time since that day in 1944 at his home in Syracuse. Smith, in accordance with the usual policy at the time, had been immediately returned to the United States

after having had contact with the underground behind enemy lines. Smith had not known whether Fulmer had lived or died that day.

Visits to the Fulmer house became more regular. Albert Spring, James Westbury and Fred Bramley have all visited the Fulmers in the U.S. In 1990, Edward Fulmer was again invited to Holland to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Military Order of William. The ceremony was no less impressive than that of his previous trip to the Royal Court. Dr. van Empel had passed away, but the Fulmers were accommodated by the good doctor's son. This time Ed Fulmer wanted to see Opheusden and the crash Sill'. The former pilot was amazed when he saw how far the Willems ens had carried him on a stretcher. He was met, greeted, and surrounded by the villagers as a celebrity,

According to Fulmer: "Every care was taken by the Dutch government to ensure that our trip and our return home was a pleasant experience. Going to Opheusden was the greatest climax possible to a fairyland trip that Lucille and I will remember all our lives. "



bridge: ad-lib  
 HERE'S A TOAST TO THE MOST OF THOSE WHO LOVE THE VASTNESS OF THE SKYY  
 OLE' FATHER TIME

Cartoon drawn in 2001 by veteran George N. Doll, Pvt., Medical Technician, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron, depicting the history of the 315th troop Carrier Group – Olmsted Field, Harrisburg, PA , 14 Feb 1942 ~ Bowman Field, KY, 17 Jun 1942 ~ Florence, SC, 3 Aug -11 Oct 1942 ~ Aldermaston, England, 1 Dec 1942 ~ Welford Park, England, 6 Nov 1943 ~ Blida, Algeria, 25 May 1943 – Mar 1944 ~ Spanhoe, England, 7 Feb 1944 ~ Amiens Glisy, France, 6 Apr - May 1945 ~ Waller Field, Trinidad May - 31 Jul 1945





(Above) Photo of the Spanhoe monument from Brinson's original book in 1983.

This marks the end of Brinson's and Cholewczynski's original books.

Following are items added by Miles Hamby for the 3rd edition.