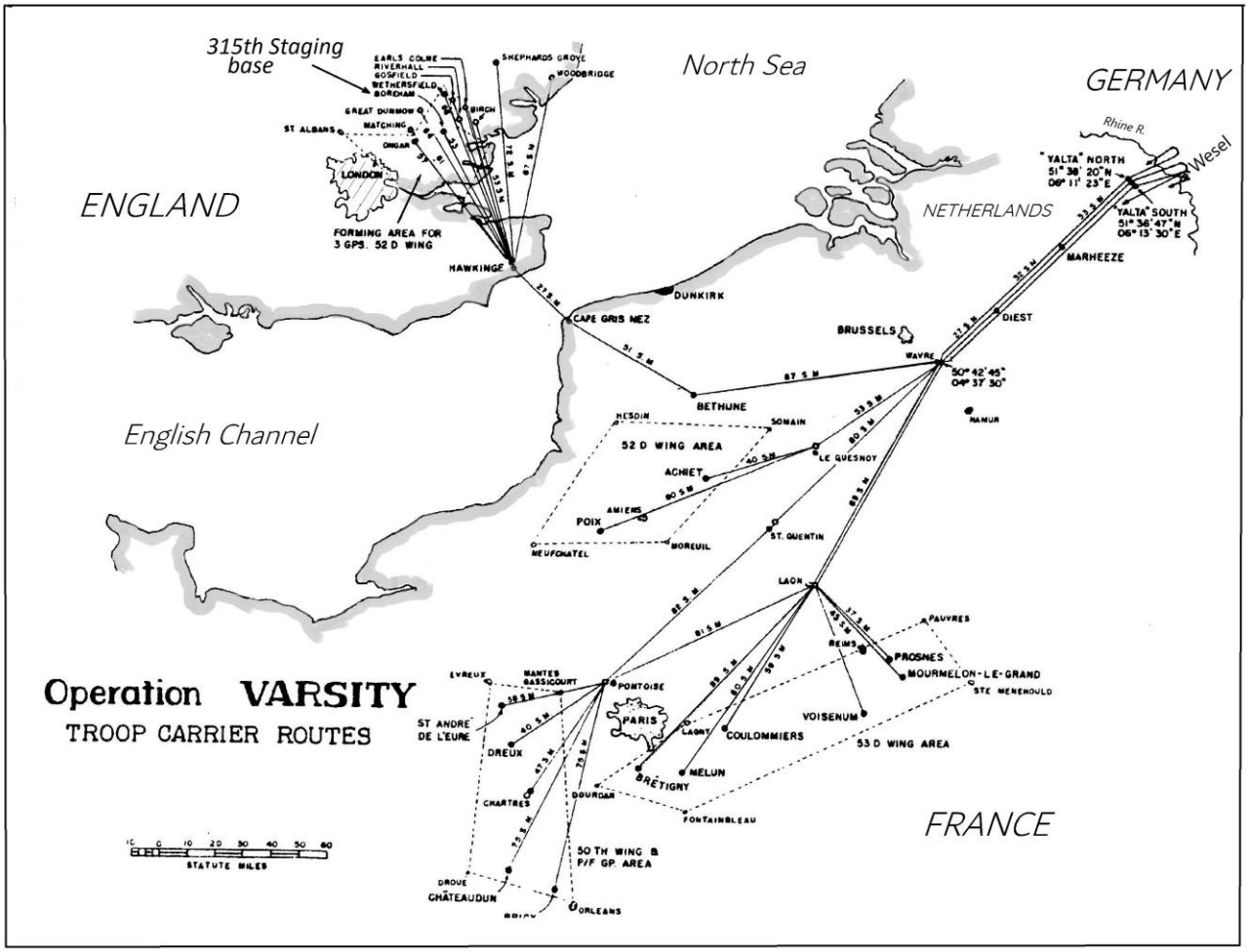

Chapter 10

RHINE CROSSING

— BRINSON'S HISTORY —

In late March 1945, the 315th participated in the last airborne operation in Europe during World War II. Its code name was Operation VARSITY and its mission was to facilitate a Rhine River crossing in the Wesel area by Anglo-American troops.

VARSITY was designed to deliver all airborne troops in one lift, instead of having a series of missions as was done in the Holland operation the preceding September. The American groups, except for three, flew from bases in France. The British groups, plus three from 52nd Troop Carrier Wing (the 61st, the 315th, and the 316th) used airfields in East Anglia near the staging area of the British 6th Airborne Division. The airfield selected for the 315th was Boreham, in Essex, about 30 miles northeast of London, near the town of Chelmsford.

In addition to the British 6th Airborne Division, the U. S. 17th and 13th were selected to participate in VARSITY, but the 13th Airborne Division was later withdrawn. The British 1st Airborne Division had suffered very heavy losses at Arnhem and was not ready, and the other two U. S. Airborne Divisions, the 82nd and the 101st, had been in the line almost continuously since Operation Market the preceding autumn.

On the 11th of March, a small advance party went to Boreham from Spanhoe to check the facilities and to conduct liaison with the British. Eight days later, on the 22nd, the 315th planes, crews, and support personnel moved to Boreham. The 310th Squadron, which was assigned the task of feeding and housekeeping the entire group at Boreham, provided the largest contingent of support personnel.

As the takeoffs for VARSITY were scheduled for early on the morning of the 24th, all briefings for the missions were held on the 23rd. Crew chiefs and radio operators were briefed in the afternoon; pilots and navigators were briefed in two sessions in the evening. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Mandt, Group Operations

Officer, covered the overall mission: Major Messenger, Intelligence; Captain Hedley, Communications. The weathermen predicted excellent weather for the following morning. Crews were provided with the latest information on the route, airspeeds and altitudes to be maintained times over the checkpoints, and enemy opposition to be expected in the drop zone area. The number of flak batteries shown on the intelligence map overlay was not encouraging, even though over 1,000 Allied fighters were supposed to be in the drop zone area immediately before, and during the drop.

The drop zones were near the town of Wesel, north of the Ruhr. The objective of the paratroopers was the Diesfordter Wald, a wooded area between three and five miles east of the Rhine. Drop Zone Baker (DZ-B), the 315th's target, was one of ten DZs located in an area less than six miles long and five miles wide.

Bordering the eastern edge of the drop zone was the Issel River, and immediately east, of the river lay a half-completed autobahn. About one mile inside the northeast corner of the drop area was the village of Harnminkeln It was along the river and the autobahn that many of the German gun emplacements were located.

The morning of the 24th was bright, sunny and cool. The men entering the mess hall for breakfast were greeted by Captain Joel Schulman and "The Dakotans" playing the latest popular tines. Before departing, Chaplain Colin Coker offered a prayer and asked that all the men flying that day be granted a safe return.

By foot, jeep, sedan and truck, the aircrews went from the mess hall to the aircraft parked around the Boreham airfield. All crew members were in position by 0630. Emplaning was delayed briefly while British paratroopers finished their morning tea, but all 81 crews began starting engines when the Very pistol flare was observed from the control tower. The first plane in Serial B-5 started down the runway shortly after 0700. Eighty other planes followed. and formed into two serials -- one of 45 aircraft and the second, Serial B-6, of 36 aircraft.

The 43rd Squadron, led by Colonel Lyon, took the lead. They were followed by Lieutenant Colonel Smith leading 18 planes from the 34th and Major Brinson leading a composite squadron of planes made of planes and crews from the 34th, 309th and 310rh. Serial B-6 was immediately behind led by Lieutenant Colonel Stark and the 309th planes. Flying next was Major Rylance with 18 planes from the 3I0th.

As the group formed into its "V of Vs" formation, other British and American troop carrier groups departed from airfields in Essex area could be seen climbing and forming. The sky over the entire southeast part of England appeared to be filled with aircraft. The troop carrier column was reported later to be 420 miles long. In addition to the troop carriers, 900 fighters were scheduled to be in the target area to suppress the flak, and over 1,200 other Allied fighters were to be east of the Rhine.

The first checkpoint was Folkestone on the coast of Kent. From there, the Group headed across the Strait of Dover to Cape Gris Nez, and then took a dogleg course of 138 miles to Wavre, a railroad and highway junction, eleven miles southeast of Brussels, and just west of the famous Waterloo battlefield. At Wavre, crew members began strapping on flak vests, aprons, and helmets. A few of the more enterprising crew members had somehow obtained extra flak aprons to place on the floor where they normally stood or sat. Captain Jack Alexander remarked, "We learn by experience. In planes with no armor plating, there can't be too many flak suits on board to suit me."

At Wavre, the formation turned and headed for the village of Weeze, twelve miles west of the Rhine. At Weeze, a slow descent was begun to a drop altitude of700 feet above the ground; airspeed was reduced to 120 mph, and then to 110; and the red alert lights were turned on.

Near Weeze, an unexpected problem was faced. The amphibious crossing of the Rhine in this area had been shielded by a smoke screen that extended for nearly forty miles along the river. The smoke covered the local visual aids near the river, and combined with the local haze, reduced visibility between the river and the drop zone to one mile or less. Notwithstanding, the Group identified Drop Zone B and, as the planes began passing overhead, green lights were flashed and the paratroopers began to fill the sky. From 1003 until approximately nine minutes later, 1,237 men from the British 6th Airborne Division (Sth Parachute Brigade, 7th and 12th Battalions) were dropped by the 315th. An additional 250-300 parapacks floated to the ground – salvoed a few seconds before the troops jumped. The men of this unit stated later that the pilots of the 315th flew straight and true and gave them an excellent jump. The British, heavily laden with equipment, took several seconds longer than expected to vacate the planes. This,

in turn, required a longer eastward run-in than foreseen, and the aircraft were over the Issel River before they began turning.

Some ground fire was noticed while approaching the drop zone. Several crewmen reported at debriefings that at least two aircraft were hit and burning before the jump began.

As the 315th formations passed over the DZ and turned left, the situation changed abruptly as intense and accurate flak from the German 7th Parachute Division, in the woods near Mehr, swept the serials. Few planes escaped damage, and some began to burn and fall. Ten aircraft were shot down in the next few minutes, and seven others came down west of the Rhine.

The 43rd Squadron was hit hard. Colonel Lyon's lead plane started down. Major Matson, C. O. of the 43rd, leading the next formation of nine aircraft, was seen to crash. Lieutenant Hoffman's plane was on fire. Lieutenant Martin's plane went into the ground, and the planes piloted by Lieutenant R. M. Perkins and Lieutenant J. K. Young were in serious trouble with either wounded pilots or seriously crippled airplanes.

Shell fragments damaged both engines of Captain R. L. Adam's 34th Squadron C-47, causing both engines to cut on and off intermittently. When both engines finally stopped, Captain Adams was forced to make a dead stick belly landing.

Four planes from the 309th Squadron landed west of the drop zone, three at airfields and one, piloted by Lieutenant J.W Way, in an open field. They were considered too seriously damaged to continue flight.

The 310th Squadron, positioned at the rear of the second serial, did not escape unscathed. Technical Sergeant Williams, on Captain W. G. Hurst's plane, was killed when the plane took a burst of flak. Lieutenant Moll Zartman was forced to land at the nearest available airfield after a shell exploded in the companionway of his aircraft and his radio operator was severely wounded. Lieutenant Bernard Berman and his crew bailed out afterthe plane's flight controls were severely damaged. Four other men from the 310th were wounded – Lieutenant Esplin, Staff Sergeant Born, Staff Sergeant Jennings and Corporal Carmody. As a result of such concentrated fire, much of the formation lost coherence. Pilots, finding themselves separated from their original flight, 'joined other flights for their homeward journey. Other returned to England alone. One pilot stated that he did not see another plane westward bound on his return flight until he reached the English coast. Around 1245, the first C-47s began landing at Spanhoe. There were few that were not damaged by flak or small arms fire. Several had inoperative hydraulic systems. By dark that evening, six planes were unaccounted for, the crews of two others were known to have known to have bailed out, three had crash-landed near the drop zone, and seven were reported as having landed at airfields in Belgium, France, or Holland. Battle damage was finally determined as 19 of 81 aircraft destroyed, or beyond repair, and 36 other aircraft with varying degrees of damage. Operation VARSITY was, by far, the most costly single mission in which the 315th was engaged. For the next several days, information concerning the missing crewmen was received from various sources. On 1 April, Colonel Lyon and some of his crew were located in a hospital in southern England. They were visited by Lieutenant Colonels Gibbons and Mandt, who obtained an account of what happened after their plane was hit by flak.

The first shell which came in through the cockpit floor wounded Colonel Lyon in the foot, face and arms. Captain Carl Persson, flying in the right seat, took over the flight controls, while Captain B.E. Coggins, the navigator, assisted Colonel Lyon from his seat. Almost immediately; the plane was struck by another burst of flak which took away part of the throttle quadrant and part of Captain Persson's hand. This burst also wounded Captain Coggins in the leg and started a fire in the flight compartment. Although Coggins was dazed by the explosion, he reached forward and pulled back the control wheel, which temporarily placed the aircraft in a climbing attitude. Colonel Lyon gave instructions to abandon the aircraft, after which Technical Sergeant Charles Jones and Staff Sergeant James Zender jumped, followed by Lieutenant J .E. Burroughs, the radar navigator. Lyon helped Persson leave his seat, remove his flak suit, and get into his parachute. The two of them, with Coggins, went to the rear of the plane and jumped. Almost immediately after their parachutes opened they landed, and within minutes they were in the hands of German soldiers. Lyon and Persson were first taken to a nearby house and later to a German first-aid station approximately three miles away. (Sergeant Y.A. Pratt, who was on another plane, was also brought into the same first-aid station.) En route to this station, their C-47 was observed burning in a nearby field. A few days later, the medical station where they were, near Gescher,

Germany, was overrun by British troop, and the wounded were returned to England. Sergeants Jones and Zender became prisoners of war.

Other post operational reports came in during the next few days and weeks. Lieutenant George Hoffman reported that after dropping his troops and turning off the drop zone, his plane was hit twice by flak, the second burst setting the left engine on fire. The built-in fire extinguisher had no effect, therefore, Hoffman gave the order to bail out. They jumped just west of the Rhine and at an altitude Hoffman estimated to be 80 feet. Drifting eastward, Hoffman landed in the river. He was fished out by a soldier from the 51st Scottish Highland Division who told him that all four parachutes that left his plane were seen to open. The aircraft crashed on the west bank of the Rhine and exploded. Corporal W.D. Reynolds, the radio operator, did not survive the jump.

The field in which Lieutenant J.K. Young crash landed was mined. The crew, none of whom were injured, were informed of this fact by British soldiers who were nearby and cleared a path through the minefield for the plane's occupants. Major W.M. Messenger, was the only man in the 315th who was qualified to wear W.W.I Army of Occupation stripes on his uniform. He was the 315th's Group Intelligence Officer, had gone along with Lieutenant Young and his crew "for the ride." He reported that he received more first hand knowledge of the German gun emplacements in the drop zone area than he hoped to obtain.

Lieutenant W. W. Harper, flying co-pilot with Major Matson was located in a British hospital in mid-April. Harper informed the interrogating officer that their plane was hit in the left engine while they were over the drop zone. A few minutes thereafter, the rudder controls were destroyed by another burst of flak and seconds after that a shell seemed to explode in the cockpit. Harper remembered reaching for his parachute, buy recalled nothing else until regaining consciousness lying in a German farmhouse. Lieutenant R. E. Allen, the navigator on the plane, was brought to the same house while Harper was there, and died of his injuries about 45 minutes later. The crew chief, Technical Sergeant Norman Brown, also arrived, unconscious, on a stretcher. The first-aid men who brought Sergeant Brown to the aid-station informed Harper that the pilot [Major Matson] and the radio operator [S/Sergeant R.D. Brady] had been killed when the plane crashed. Sergeant Brown died later.

The 43rd crew of Lieutenant C. E. Martin, Lieutenant R. L. Martin, Lieutenant R.L. Hodge, Jr., Technical Sergeant M. L. Cohen, and Staff Sergeant E. D. Armitage were later confirmed as having been killed in action. Just before the Group left Spanhoe, a letter was received from Colonel Lyon which stated: "I regret that I cannot personally congratulate each of you crew members for your outstanding performance on our last mission. It was splendid. Now as a result of Jerry's good aim, I will be hospitalized for a few months, and Lieutenant Colonel Gibbons will take over as your Group Commander. I am sure you will prosper under his capable leadership, and will carry on toward bigger and better goals. I am full of confidence in your ability. It has been a distinct honor and privilege to have served with you and for you. With very best wishes to all."

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RHINE CROSSING

— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

Colonel Howard B. Lyon
Commander, 315th Troop Carrier Group

While the combat crews had breakfast, the 315th dance band, The Dakotans, played music, mostly the ever popular Glenn Miller tunes. I loved music. In fact, I had played in a jazz band to help pay for college. I couldn't help tapping my foot to the "American Patrol" trumpet solo. We knew the war would soon be over and we were in good spirits. The drop zones were only a few miles behind the Rhine River and the weather was beautiful.

Our crews were ready for takeoff at 0630, but there was a slight delay while the British paratroopers finished their tea. I was flying the lead ship for the group. Because we had Rebecca, Gee and pathfinder radar on board, our plane had two navigators. Bernie Coggins was my "land" navigator, and John Burroughs was operating the Gee equipment.

As we formed into our V of V's, prior to leaving England, the other British and American troop carrier groups were also forming and departing from other airfields; the sky was pretty much filled with airplanes. The column was reported to be 420 miles long, and that was only troop carriers.

The flying was beautiful that morning. At Wavre,

Belgium, we made our last turn, from then on it was straight to the drop zone. It was here that all the troop carrier wings - the one from England and the two now stationed in France - converged. We started a slow descent to our drop altitude of 500 feet. Actually, we descended a little less than that because the paratroopers wanted to drop, the parachute to pop, and hit the ground as soon as possible. As the lead airplane, we dropped at between 4 to 500 feet. Incidentally, it was a very successful drop, as the later intelligence proved. We were right on target. The sticks from all of our 81 aircraft were very well clustered.

So we found the well-marked DZ without any problems. The smoke screen that was laid down by Montgomery's forces caused the drop area to be quite smoky and cloudy. But, even *so,* with the additional navigation equipment we had, we could have dropped on a football field without any visual reference to the ground.

(Above) Col. Howard B. Lyon, C. O. of 315th TCG during VARSITY. *Official USAF personnel photo.*

Captain Bernard E. Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

Our DZ was across the Rhine River, not too far from a little town called Wesel. Since we were only going four or five miles into enemy territory, this particular mission was considered to be a milk run. Not only was this a terrible mistake, it was one of the greatest mistakes, as far as our group was concerned, made during the entire war.

We had an all-out effort on this particular mission. I was flying in the lead ship with our commanding officer, Colonel HB Lyon. I don't really and truly remember how many planes we had that day, but we had a full group, all four squadrons out. There were planes everywhere, and all of them were ours.

As we neared the Rhine we ran into another problem. A smoke screen had been laid to provide cover for Montgomery's army, and it was drifting toward our drop zone. The German fire got to be something to see. On our right was a group flying a new plane in combat for the first time, the C-46. Several of those were going down in flames. I even called it to the attention to Colonel Lyon: "Good gosh, I'm sure glad that we're not down there with that bunch."

(Above) Curtiss C-46 "Commando", supplemented the C-47s of the 315th TCG. *Photo from https://315Group.org*

Being the lead plane, our drop would determine where the other 315th planes would drop. There was a power line crossing the approach end of the drop zone, and it was there that the jump would begin. Here we got a break. The smoke screen began to break up and the power line appeared. We were at jump altitude and the green light was turned on. The plane was just above stalling and the left engine was throttled back to reduce wind speed when the paratroopers exited the plane.

The British paratroopers normally took longer to exit the plane than American paratroopers, and by the time the parapacks were released and all the troopers were out, we were approaching an autobahn under construction. As the final trooper cleared the plane, Colonel Lyon nosed it down and pushed the throttles to the firewall and we were heading back toward the Rhine River

1st Lieutenant John E. Burroughs,
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

I was flying Pathfinder-lead in my own little blacked out office with my radar, Gee Box, and Rebecca. Colonel Lyon complimented me, "Great job, John. Right down the middle." We dropped our troops, turned off the DZ, and were climbing out on the way home when all hell broke loose.

Captain Bernard E. Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

I turned around to Burroughs, the other navigator, and said, "Take us hack home, I'm tired. I've been under a lot of pressure trying to get over this DZ." As I was talking to him, I heard a bullet come through the airplane, and Colonel Lyon grunted.

Colonel Howard B. Lyon
Commander, 315th Troop Carrier Group

Well, that's when we started getting hit by enemy flak and small arms. At that, you could hit us with a pop-gun or a slingshot. I did a 180 to the left, hit the deck because I had to pull away fast so all of the other planes wouldn't start running into each other. We were all in a hurry to get out and back to England. At that time we were pretty near on the deck. We were getting hit by flak, 20mm, and probably larger, and small arms fire. We couldn't tell which was which, but we were getting beat up pretty badly. They were probably even throwing rocks.

The first shell came up through the nose of the aircraft on the pilot's side. It went up through the bottom of my left foot and exploded out the top of my knee. After that, by instinct, I reached and pushed all the throttles, propcontrols, and mixture controls forward. The good old C-47 started climbing. We were probably at 1,000 feet, and we were still being hit by the enemy fire. The co-pilot had his hand on the throttle quadrant, and a shell came in and sheared the controls off, and most of his left hand with it. We reached a sufficient altitude, but then a fire broke out in the companionway, in back of my seat. I ordered the bailout signal.

Captain Bernard E. Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

I immediately turned and went to the cockpit and found out that a bullet had come up through the bottom of the plane, gone through one of his feet, and exited out the top of the plane. I asked him if he would like some first aid, and he said yes, he would, and turned over the controls to Captain Persson. I released his flak suit to cut down on his over-all weight, and I reached down and picked him up in my arms and turned to go to the rear of the plane to give first aid. As I did, the entire nose of the airplane turned into a red flash. I didn't have any idea what happened to the colonel, but I definitely remember floating through the air. I remember thinking that, "This is the way you feel when you're getting killed."

I wound up in the radio operator's seat. He was in the rear of the airplane with the crew chief pulling in the static lines. My first thought was to get back to the cockpit. The co-pilot, Captain Persson, had been flying the plane, and had been possibly closer to the explosion than I had, and my first thoughts were that he was going to slump forward, hit the controls, and boom ... we were gone!

I pulled myself up out of the radio operator's chair, took a step, and hit the floor. Still not realizing there was anything wrong with me, I climbed back up, took another step and bam, I hit the floor again. This time I looked down and saw that my left leg between knee and ankle was shattered, and my foot was absolutely no use at all. Again, I climbed up and by holding a cable that extended the length of the airplane, I was able to make my way to the cockpit.

I think probably that the only thing that saved us was that Captain Persson was a very conservative type pilot, and not only did he have his seat belt fastened, but he also had his chest belt fastened. He had his hand on the throttle quadrant. When the shell hit us, it shot off the throttle quadrant along with part of his hand. The control yoke by the pilot seat was destroyed. I looked out the front and realized we were approaching the ground very fast. I reached in and grabbed what was left of the yoke on the pilot's side of the plane, and pulled it all the way back. The C-47 went immediately into a steep climb. I held the plane in this position until it began to shudder, and I realized then that the plane was about to stall. I pushed it forward to a level flight position, and set the auto pilot. I noticed that Captain Persson, who had been dazed pretty bad, had shook himself out of it and said, "What do you think we ought to do?" I replied, "I don't know what you're going to do, but I'm gonna get off this airplane."

I looked behind me, and saw hydraulic fluid on fire

and burning, and I was trying to decide which way to go, and he said, "I tell you what, you go on back there and get your parachute on, and I'll stay here now, and when I feel you jump, I'll come back and jump." When you had on your flak suit, you couldn't wear your chest chute. You wore the harness underneath, and then, when you had to jump, you took off your flak suit and hooked the chest chute to two big snaps on the harness.

I lay down on my stomach and crawled under the hydraulic fire that the wind was sweeping across the companionway, made my way back into the cabin, found a parachute, and laying on my back was attempting to hook it into the harness snaps. Because I was weak, or whether something else was wrong with me, I was having a problem, and finally I just said to myself, "well, either I'm gonna get off of this thing, or I'm not going to get off" I reached and hooked on one side of the parachute, and then other, and then I turned over on my stomach and crawled over to the door. I found that the crew chief and radio operator had already jumped. At what stage of the situation they had jumped, I didn't really know. The other navigator was sitting in the door, and with a little encouragement from me, he jumped. And then I myself pulled myself up to the door and jumped. I pulled myself out in a head-down position because of my broken leg.

1st Lieutenant John E. Burroughs,
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We took the first hit in the nose of the aircraft forward of the instrument panel. I shed my flak suit and as I reached the jump door, the aircraft dropped out from under me. As I floated out the jump door, I grabbed the rib alongside the door and held on, legs flapping in the breeze. I yelled for the guys (Staff Sergeant James Zender and Technical Sergeant Charles Jones) to "Pull me in, I'm not ready to go yet!" They pulled me back in and as they did, another shell burst just outside the door, knocking all of us on our rear ends.

Then we went out, Zender and Jones first, and I followed. As soon as the aircraft's elevator passed overhead, I pulled my ripcord. We had bailed out awfully low. My chute opened immediately and bullets started zinging very dose by. I continued to oscillate as much as possible to make a more difficult target. Since I was busy trying to keep from being hit, I failed to get myself turned to face the direction of drift for impact, and took all of my weight on my right leg. The leg broke, but I was not aware of it until I put all of my weight on it when I tried to get up. My left leg was pointed in the direction I wanted to go, but the right was pointed in the opposite.

Colonel Howard B. Lyon
Commander, 315th Troop Carrier Group

Cog, my navigator, had come up. By that time I had been hit in the arm and in the face. Cog reached up and pulled the wheel back, which gave us additional elevation up to 1,000 feet. Then I tried to help the co-pilot out. He got up and out of his seat, and I helped him into his parachute, then we went back.

We were shot down very near the drop zone. When I parachuted, I landed near this road, in a ditch. The Germans were shooting at us when we were coming down in our parachutes, but they didn't hit me thank goodness. They kept their guns pointed towards me. They had a motorcycle with a sidecar, and put me in the sidecar, and headed up the road.

At that moment I was in pretty bad shape. We drove up and I see this aircraft, a *C-47,* burning off to the left. I looked at the tail, and confirmed that it was my aircraft. I was very pleased about that, because we had the special navigation equipment which the Germans would have liked to have gotten hold of.

Captain Bernard E. Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

But back to the story now. As I said, I pulled myself out and down, and reached up and pulled the ripcord. It was just like pulling a string across a tabletop. My first thoughts were, "Lord, they forgot to hook this thing up on tile inside. I reached up with the intention of pulling it open with my hands, and lo and behold, Hooked up and there was the biggest, prettiest white umbrella I had ever seen. I was out of that plane, and on my way to the ground and alive!

I was drifting backwards with the wind blowing in my face. The quiet was unbelievable. All at <nee I began to hear sounds like bees buzzing past me. Suddenly my right leg flew up over my head and I realized that I had been shot from the ground. After all the trouble of getting out of the plane I was now going to be killed before reaching earth. I had seen movies where the jumper reached up and pulled the lines on one shoulder and spilled the air from his

chute. I reached up, pulled the lines and down I went. I didn't hear any more "bees," and the trees were coming up fast. I made one major miscalculation, and that was that trees were not tall enough to break my fall, and I landed on my right leg and butt. I flipped onto my back, and became entangled in the lines. The sky above was, filled with planes, all ours, looking for ground targets.

Pushing myself up or my elbows I received a big surprise: not over 50 feet from where I lay was a German anti-aircraft position with umpteen guns. They were firing at the planes overhead and making such a racket that they didn't hear me land behind them. All kinds of thoughts went through my mind. I had my .45 on my hip but if I used it and hit a German with each shot, I would run out: of ammunition long before I ran out of Germans. I then considered covering myself with leaf mold and trying to hide until the British forces arrived, As all this was happening, I was getting weaker. Looking down at my leg I saw a stream of blood pumping out. My choices were limited to two: lay there and bleed to death, or call to the Germans and see what happened.

I shouted out what I thought was the word for surrender. One of them jumped about two feet in the air and came running over to where I lay and put the business end of the rifle right between my eyes. He was very young, and I was afraid that he was as scared as I was. I eased one hand up to my forehead and gently pushed the rifle barrel to one side.

All the while I "Was asking for an officer, and a German lieutenant came over. I tried to tell him I was a navigator, but he did not understand. I started to move my arms in a flying motion. He immediately said, "Pilot? Pilot?" I nodded my head, surely not wanting him to think I was a paratrooper - they weren't taken prisoner that often. All of this was going on while a German medic was putting a compress on my left leg.

While all of this was going on Allied planes were flying all over the area looking for targets. There was a big Lancaster stooging around with its bomb bay doors open. The gang that had me was firing tracers, and I was afraid that he would see us. Fortunately he spotted tracers coming from a wooded area not too far from us and there he went. As he went over the target he didn't drop just one bomb, he salvoed the entire load. When the smoke and dust cleared, even the trees were gone. My captors got the message. They packed their guns, got a stretcher from somewhere, put me on it, and away we went. We came to a fire road in the woods, and in a short time a horse and wagon appeared. The wagon had small side boards along the edges. A German was seated driving, and another was in the rear with a Red Cross flag. There were three wounded on board, two Germans, and the other was John Burroughs with a broken leg.

1st Lieutenant John E. Burroughs,
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

As I started to get up, two shots zinged over my head, so I dropped on my back and putting both of my hands up, I surrendered. The two soldiers poked me with their rifles to get me up, but I pointed to my broken leg and said, "Kaput," so one of them went for a splint and a litter. I was then carried out of the area to a horse cart and placed in it. Bernie Coggins was picked up by the same cart. He had been hit in the left leg, as I recall, and fragments of bone were sticking out of the wound. There was a driver and a second German soldier, along with a wounded German in the cart.

I was propped up against the front end of the cart. Coggins was lying facing me on the right side. We passed several of these carts with dead horses in harness and dead soldiers alongside the road. The road was pockmarked with bomb craters attesting to the reasons for the carnage. As we were moving along the road I heard a Rolls-Royce powered aircraft approaching from behind us. I called to Coggins, "If I'm not badly mistaken, that's a Spitfire, and he's coming after us." Coggins answered, "You're right. We've got to do something, and quick." He grabbed the German's pant leg and shook it, making a cross with his index fingers. The German gave him the Red Cross flag, said, "Ja, ja," and immediately bailed out of the cart. Coggins managed to grab the flag, and holding one corner, yelled to me, "Here John, catch!" 1 caught the flag and taking it by both corners, held my side down as low as 1 could, while Coggins held his side up. The Spitfire banked left, and then right, paralleling the road, looking down as he went by, the pilot flashing us the "V" sign. We breathed a tremendous sigh of relief.

1st Lieutenant Charles Yoegelin
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We stayed overnight at Boreham, and I'll never forget the night before. You know you're supposed to get crew rest, and we had all these crews, 15-20, pilots sleeping in one room. All of us were frightened. Someone would wake up, light a cigarette at 2:00 in the morning, and say "I can't sleep." Then nobody could sleep, and here you've got to take off on a mission in a few hours.

1 remember the intensity over the DZ. I knew the squadron CO, Sig Matson, rather well, and I liked him. 1 usually flew on his right wing. I always had what I thought was my own airplane, but on that mission, I was in a different airplane, on Sig's left wing. This was a harder position to fly. We were the lead element, and then 1 had the third element of off my wing, and I had to hold my position. Colonel Matson had Albert Mitchell in "my" airplane on his right wing, and I was not happy about that.

HB Lyon was all the way out in front, leading the serials. There wasn't a plane in the sky ahead of him. That was the largest airborne mission ever flown. There was not a soul in the sky until we came over the horizon. 1 have never seen anything like it as far as the flak. It was unbelievable, and it all happened so quickly.

When we were approaching the Rhine, it was such a disciplined looking group. Good formation. We had the red warning light on, and you'd put the green on as soon as you see the troopers coming out of the plane ahead of you.

Here I'm looking at this beautiful formation, and all of a sudden the sky goes black. I could see Matson looking at me, and I knew he was in trouble.

All of a sudden there we smoke and fire, and boom, he was gone. And Mitchell, his right wing man, I looked over there, and he was gone. I looked ahead, and I was the only plane flying into Germany at the time. I did the old escape routine, get as close as possible to the ground, do a 180, and we knew our way home. My plane was hit quite badly, but it was flying all right. At that time there was an isolated position still held by the Germans on the coast, and damrnit, I almost flew right over that.

I got back to Spanhoe, one of the first ones, and Lieutenant Colonel Mandt was waiting there, and when he saw me, he shook his head. I said, "You're not going to forget this one. A lot of them are not coming back."

2nd Lieutenant George Hoffman ("Junior")
Pilot, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We were briefed that the flak would be off to the right of the drop zone. After we dropped, we were heading out, and being good boys, stayed away from where we had been briefed on the flak. All of a sudden Colonel Lyon's airplane started climbing up, and then went back down. It straightened itself out, and then started going in. Everybody there spread out, and that pushed me into where we weren't supposed to go. When I did get back, Captain Carnick said that his airplane's right wing was just riddled with holes.

We were moving from the DZ and I looked and the engine was on fire, burning profusely. I went through single engine procedure, shutting it down, turning the gas off and told the co-pilot to hit the fire extinguisher. The crew chief said that he had already done it. That didn't help any; it was still burning profusely. I was climbing, we were at 900 feet or so. We dropped at 500 feet so the chute would open, slow them down and then they'd hit the ground.

I saw the tracer bullets going across, looked like you could walk on the lead that was flying around. One engine was on fire and I told the crew to get out. I set it up for straight and level flight so it wouldn't careen off in some direction. I went to the back door to jump, and the radio operator was still there. He was a young kid, just standing there, the same age as 1 was. 1 told him to get out, and he just stood there. I then ordered him out. I don't know what I would have done if he hadn't jumped. I probably would have gone back to the cockpit to see what we could do, but I was afraid that the fire would weaken the wing, and if it fell off it would be very difficult to get out of there.

When the radio operator jumped, we were just about over the middle of the Rhine River. There was such a wind blowing that it just blew our chutes eastward. I ended up almost in the middle of the river. I looked around trying to decide which bank was closer. The eastern shore was a little bit closer. I called on the Lord to help me, and he helped. All of a sudden a fellow appeared. He was shouting something, and I didn't understand what he was saying. At that point I didn't care if he was a German

or not, but it turned out that he was a Scotsman. He was in the medical corps. He had come out in a rowboat to help me in. At that time I was tired, trying to shed my parachute, my shoes, and some of my clothing. I had been on the swimming team and was a fairly strong swimmer, but was getting tired. I climbed into the rowboat. He got me to shore. I was also very grateful to him because he guided me through the minefields,

That's what happened to the radio operator - he landed in a minefield and was killed there. The other two, the crew chief and co-pilot, had landed between the lines, were captured, and then rescued by the paratroopers we had dropped. It was a pretty fluid situation. The British on the west bank of the river were occupying German trenches. I had arrived just in time for tea. From then on it was a matter of getting back to the base. I started hitching rides, in a water buffalo [LVT – Landing Vehicle Tank], ambulance, truck, and finally an airplane. Spent the night in a hospital in Holland. The next morning I had nurses serving me breakfast in bed.

I got back to England and Colonel Mandt from headquarters picked us up. There was a whole planeload of us. He got onto the plane. I was in all sorts and parts of uniform that I had picked up: German boots, German pants, a British coat. As the colonel walked toward the cockpit, he stopped, turned around, and said, "Might have known it was you, Hoffman."

I went back to operations, told them I wanted to go up and shoot some landings. Lieutenant Bob Cook was there, and I asked if he wanted to go up with me as co-pilot. We went up, I did some landings, and the next day I was back on flight status, flying supplies to the Continent. It seemed natural. After all I was just 20 years old.

Captain William M. Perkins
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Around 0800 my flight of three C-47s lifted off to join the 78 other planes from the 315th Troop Carrier Group. We flew in a formation of nine aircraft abreast, and joined the aerial armada headed to the far side of the Rhine River.

It was a pleasant, cloudless spring day. But as we approached the west bank of the Rhine, the east bank was difficult to see in detail due to a heavy- smoke screen which covered the area. As the flight reached the east bank intense antiaircraft fire erupted, with smoke so dense it was like flying at night At our 1,000 foot altitude, flak was bursting in all directions around the plane with orange flames breaking out in the dense black atmosphere. The ack-ack looked like fireworks. The smoke was so thick and visibility so limited that I was unable to see the ground below, nor any other plane, not even those off my wing. I was beginning to think that mine was the only plane still in air.

Nearing what I considered to be the drop zone, the ground fire continued Exploding balls of flame and black smoke created a turbulence which buffered. the plane. Shrapnel rattled against the fuselage, some of it piercing the aluminum skin. I reduced power and directed the co-pilot to drop the flaps 114 to reduce airspeed. The red light had been switched on to alert the jumpmaster, and three minutes later the green was switched on. In the split second after the green light was activated, a powerful flak explosion shook plane, bouncing it almost out of control. At that moment things suddenly. went awry. Crawling on his hands and knees, the crew chief appeared in the cockpit door, shouting that the stick of paratroopers failed to jump. The flak burst bowled the two lead paratroopers back into the plane causing the others, to fall, and unable to leave the airplane. The two paratroopers were wounded as was my radio operator.

Although I was unhappy about having to make a pass over the drop zone, I told the crew chief that I would re-set the jump lights, and that he was to get all the paratroopers out, even if he had to pick them up and throw them out himself How badly wounded the two British paratroopers were was unknown, but I reasoned that it was best to get them to the ground where first aid might be administered.

Since our radio operator had been wounded, I sent the co-pilot back to help haul in the static lines. The task completed, and still under heavy ground fire, we were at 800 feet. I raised the flaps and pushed the throttles to the firewall and made a descending 180-degree turn to the left, and hopefully back to Spanhoe. By the time we reached the river, my altitude was under 500 feet, with the throttles to the firewall gliding in a downward approach. My airspeed indicated 180 MPH as we attempted to outrace the barrage of enemy flak and small arms fire.

By this maneuver I had reached a space below the line of antiaircraft fire, but ack-ack bursts were still occurring above and ahead, tracer bullets arching from below.

After reaching the west side of the river, no more ground fire was encountered. The radio operator was patched up with only a minor wound to the leg. We headed west toward England at treetop level, with no further problems until a few miles from Spanhoe. The RPMs on the right engine dropped suddenly as the engine began misfiring. The temperature gauge climbed into the red, indicating over 260 degrees Centigrade. At that point I feathered the prop and shut the engine down. Being empty, we were able to maintain enough speed and altitude with the remaining engine at full throttle to make it home safely.

After landing, an inspection of the aircraft revealed a number of ragged shrapnel tears and holes in the fuselage. One noticeable hole in the underside of the nose on the pilot's side was checked, and a bullet was found embedded in the flak pad inserted under the cushion of the pilot's seat which I had occupied. I still have that bent, expanded bullet.

It was an unpleasant and sobering return when we learned that our group commander, Colonel Lyon, and his crew had been shot down along, with ten others. My crew and I were very thankful that we were able to return safely and escape the unfortunate fate that some of the other aircrew suffered in that mission.

Captain Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We went to Boreham and spent the night there, locked down. During the night the Germans gave us a happy sendoff when two V-2s landed not that far from the airfield. Those V-2s were really something else. All of a sudden, it was just BOOM, and the ground would shake.

Everybody thought that everything was going to be all right. We were talking about a lot of things. We weren't talking about the mission. That wasn't one of the uppermost things in my mind. I figured "It's a day's work." I wasn't a fatalist. I didn't think any more than there was a possibility **Of** enemy fire, or think about it any more than the trips we took to France or what we did in North Africa. I just didn't give it too much thought.

When we approached the drop zone I saw some of those airplanes corning out and thought this might be a little hairy. It was all right until we were I coming off of the drop zone, and we started taking fire. I zigged when I should have zagged, and I got a little more fire instead of less. I started having trouble with the airplane - with the engines.

First the right engine started acting up. It just was pooping out, so I started switching tanks and switching buttons. I switched it over to cross-feed, got it to running again. That indicated to me that it was some type of problem with the fuel system. So as it started running all right, the left one started pooping out. I started looking around to switch back to another tank, and then switch it to cross feed. Then the left engine quit, and two minutes later the right engine quit.

At that time we were at, or near, the Rhine. I'm not too sure. We were at 5-600 feet. You really don't have a hell of a lot of choice when they both go, so I noticed a little field right in front of me. It was short, but it was kind of oblong. What I did was come in wheels up. I made a regular landing without power - the same procedure: gear up, flaps down. I cut both switches, which was kind of stupid when both were already dead, but I cut both switches.

I landed, and on the *C-47* the wheels are down below the oil cooler, and the props go, even though they're feathered, they still bend. Still sometimes, if you have a little hydraulics you get a little brake. I got it on the ground, and was going at a pretty good clip, and I could see that I was going to run out of room going straight ahead. I kind of eased around and did a 90 degree so I was picking up more distance on the width of the field.

It was slowing down pretty much, so I did get enough out of it so I could make a semi-90 degree turn, and kept rolling, but was getting slower and slower. There was a power line that was on the right-hand boundary of the field. We were slowing down, but at that point had no control. We were going slower and slower, and we ended up with one of those poles from the power line, that was between me and the engine on the left side. It was frightening - it was between me and the left engine. Another foot, and it would have been in the right wing, but the plane just stopped.

We jumped out at that point, and did what we had to do. We're walking around the airplane, and the radio operator was taking pictures, when this jeep comes bounding across the field with this British guy waving

his arms. We didn't know who he was at that point. I didn't even know whether I was across the Rhine or not, but he was yelling and waving his arms. We got up to see what the guy wanted, and he shouted that we were in a mine field. He then led us to the main road.

There wasn't a scratch on any of the guys in the airplane. Nothing, but there were quite a few holes in the airplane. I heard that when they lifted the airplane up and counted the number of holes between the engines, there were plenty. That was why my fuel lines were messed up.

1st Lieutenant Monroe Zartman ("Ziggie")
Pilot, 310th Troop Carrier Squadron

That day the world was divided into two groups of people: those in the planes that wished they were back at Spanhoe, and those back at Spanhoe whose combined endeavors made it possible for the aircraft armada crossing Germany's sacred Rhine.

It was brisk and sunny, but with smoke and haze reducing visibility as we crossed the river. The railroad, river, and road junction near Wesel, Germany, was a good place if you were a Kraut antiaircraft gunner. Low and slow - 700 feet high and going 100 mph - the drone of the 315th squadrons could be heard approaching.

Hundreds of fighter and attack planes from French, Belgian, and Dutch airbases were supposed to destroy or suppress the antiaircraft batteries before. our scheduled arrival. The fighter jocks, cameras clicking and guns blazing roared in, getting pictures of the woods, but not much else. Our hotshot buddies, under whose aegis we approached the DZ, were having an off day our .45s were holstered, and we were about to be outgunned!

The formation abruptly plunged into the entrance of a deadly gauntlet: smoky fireballs laced with tracer stirred the sky ahead. Sphincters at body ends of the GI tract tightened, especially for the paratroopers, who were tense and straining to get on the ground.

All eyes watched unblinking, waiting, watching, and still, no green light! Flak paced the 315th aircraft ahead. Suddenly, long lines of parachute canopies joined the melee. Green light - the drop was underway. My misled German cousins loaded fresh magazines as the second 315th serial came into range. Eyeballing the turmoil ahead, I squirmed futilely to get myself up into my flak helmet.

Already daylight was showing through some neat round holes in unusual places. Old 622 thrust ahead as the parapacks deployed. A nearby blast caused some formation adjustments as flight leader Bob Sutton repositioned himself with the drop in progress, most of the troopers in our stick went to their knees as we reacted to hold position on his left wing. This extended the drop a few seconds, enough to improve the view of old 622 in the enemy's gunsights. We may have been the last C-47 over the DZ.

The crew chief reported that the troopers were gone and the static lines were in when we were rocked as *88s* exploded entirely too close. One hit in the storage bulkhead between the navigator's position and the cockpit where we kept parachutes and the life raft. It left a jagged hole just behind my seat where the seldom used mail/baggage door had been.

The life raft and the parachutes absorbed enough of the impact to save our lives, but there was no longer a bailout option. Both co-pilot Larry Basset and I were briefly unconscious, and as vision cleared, we found old 622 nose down and in a deepening left turn. The left engine was misfiring sporadically as I, in my freshly dented flak helmet, put the struggling and maimed Gooney Bird into a "chaos maneuver." We were flying so erratically that neither I nor the German gunners knew where we would turn next.

Most gauges were inoperative, their glass covers pulverized. The cockpit and crew were covered with shark repellant and fine glass particles. Unknown to me, my eyebrows had been flash-burned away, and my black, curly locks no longer protruded from the edge of the flak helmet. Our faces had instantly "sunburned" noses and tiny specks of blood where the glass particles hit.

Unbelievably, neither Larry nor I were injured. Something besides the power of the Pratt & Whitney's [engine manufacturer], or the genius of Donald Douglas [C-47 manufacturer] brought us home that day. The crew chief had a minor shrapnel wound, but the radio operator's luck was not ours. A large shell fragment had all but severed a leg, and other wounds were draining his blood, demeanor and will.

I glanced in the direction of the yelling through the debris of the companionway, and saw Ed leaning over the radio operator, struggling to calm him and stop the bleeding. He was going into shock, and I told Basset to help, which he did after extinguishing the fire he spotted in the clutter of the nav compartment.

Probing the first aid kit like novices, they got the

radio operator sedated, and cleaned the wounds as best they could. They slowed the bleeding with compresses and make-do tourniquets, all while I gyrated, jerked and nursed old 622, trying to keep her in the wild blue yonder.

Trying to locate one of the frontline airfields in Holland, I scanned the skies. I couldn't miss a B-24 trailing smoke, two engines in flames and gear down. He appeared to be in landing mode, and sure enough, ahead was a strip lined with planes with Allied markings. Our radio out, I lined up behind the B-24, hit the gear down handles and adjusted the props to get more RPMs. Larry heard the commotion and scrambled back into the cockpit in time to lock the gear down. The horn never blared, and the "down and locked" light had been shattered.

A glance out the side window raised my already high blood pressure a quick ten points. The gear appeared to be fully down, but the tire, slowly rotating, was missing a football-sized chunk. Larry said that his wheel looked okay.

Landing on the right wheel only, it touched down as the B-24 ran off the right side of the runway in a huge cloud of dust and smoke. When we couldn't hold the left wheel up anymore, it hit, and we careened toward the left side of the landing strip, and spinning into almost a 180. We cleared the runway and shut down.

While Larry helped Ed get the radio operator onto a stretcher, I grabbed the Very pistol and jumped to the ground from the duct-taped jump door. I ran a few steps to get the Ops complex in sight, and fired two red flares [the signal that wounded was aboard]. I then noticed that I was standing in aviation gas, which was pooling under both wings, but fortunately the flares landed well away.

It wasn't long before a GI ambulance approached. The time elapsed between the time the radio operator was wounded, and the twin doors slammed on the ambulance was probably about 30 or 40 minutes. We neither saw, nor heard anything about him again.

Covered with the yellow shark repellent we ambled towards operations. Approaching the ramp we spotted a C-47 with the familiar "4A" squadron markings. Nearby was Don "Pappy" Glover, who had just put his wounded co-pilot on an ambulance. Judging Pappy's bullet-riddled plane to be "safe," we were on our way back to Spanhoe within an hour. Sharing the right seat with Larry, I had a last look at 622 when we took off. My eyes clouded. I guess I had some shark repellent in them.

Back at Spanhoe all eyes and ears were turned to the south, peering into the haze, alert for the sound of engines. Of the 81 C-47s that departed Boreham that morning, only 26 returned that day. In addition in the numerous daily burdens around the base, now letters for which the words would be hard to find had to be written and personal effects packed.

1st Lieutenant Jack E. Wilson
Pilot, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

When the 315th's troop carrier crews returned to Britain from North Africa, the aircrews were issued down-filled sleeping bags. They were just great, and at times we really needed them. They were especially handy during the Battle of the Bulge, when we had to sleep in foxholes during the frigid winter weather. Being a military man, I always kept it neatly rolled into a tight bundle when not in use.

For some reason, my outfit, the 309th, required us to take our bags along whenever we were on a mission. Some of the men ignored the directive, but I complied on that March morning when we were to drop the British across the Rhine. I stowed it in the cabin under a row of bucket seats, probably a safe enough place.

We had about 3,000 airplanes heading across that damned Rhine River. Going in we saw a big smoke screen, and a half mile to our right were the C-46s going in. I remember seeing two of them explode in midair. Those airplanes couldn't handle it.

It seemed like every Goddamned German had a machine gun or a 20mm, so it got hot and heavy. We got in there, and dropped our paratroopers right on the money, and then just split up. That was our plan, every pilot go where they wanted to. I went down, and turned left. No sooner than when I was at 200 feet, a bullet wacked me, and knocked me cold. My co-pilot, Bill Katt, was a brand new man, this was his first time in combat. I didn't know how he would handle it, no man knows until he actually goes. But Katt was right there with his hands on the throttles, and he took us through it.

I must have been out only 30 seconds. The bullet hit just to the left of my belly button. It was heading almost for my heart. It would have tore the hell out of me if! hadn't of had that flak suit on. The bullet hit with a terrific force, it was like being hit by an 8 pound sledge hammer right in the belly.

Katt was a good man. As soon as I woke up I automatically kept on flying. He let me have the controls, and away we went to Holland were we landed to get things together again. We had some gas lines shot out. I was having a hell of a time keeping both engines running.

They had shot a gas line out on my airplane. We landed in Holland because we couldn't get the fuel that was in the tanks on one side. We landed in Holland and fixed the damn thing. I was the only one that was hit, everyone else was fine.

My wingman, Lieutenant Dick, followed me in. His rudder had been shot completely off, and he said he was tired of steering the plane with the engines. Without elaborating, I can say that after a good deal of work those good crew chiefs had the gas lines repaired so we could return to England Lieutenant Dick and his crew rode with us. They would later return with a new rudder and fly their ship home.

It was very late at night when we arrived at Spanhoe and, having heard nothing from us, no one was expecting us. The first order after a combat mission was debriefing, so we went to debriefing. The intelligence officers were drunk, were very surprised to see us. I asked them what the hell was going on? They sheepishly explained that they thought that we had been shot down, as had so many of the Group's planes. At the beginning of debriefing returning combat crews always were given a good snort of whiskey to ride. them over until they could get to the officers' club. They had a rough day with all the missing crews, and you guessed it, all of the whiskey was long gone.

We said the hell with it, and we stormed out without finishing our debriefings. The officers' club had been no better. The returning crews had drunk the well dry. Damn it anyway!

The squadron reorganized over the next few days, and I remembered that I had left my sleeping bag on the plane. When I returned to get it, I found. the plane swarming with a crew repairing battle damage. I told the crew chief about my sleeping bag, and together we went to get it. When we lifted the seats I could see a jagged hole in my bag, and cursed the bastard who must have dropped something sharp on it. I then unrolled it, and it looked like a flock of ptarmigan taking off. There were feathers all over the airplane!

I started cursing the Germans. They had shot a hole through my sleeping bag! Of all the bad things they had done during the war, this was the worst according to my perspective. I felt like resigning from the Air Force and joining the infantry so I could shoot back!

I tried in vain to get another sleeping bag, but no dice. Supply didn't have any, and though they tried, never could get another. Luckily the war was: about over. Had I needed to use a sleeping bag agin, rather than the soft warm cocoon of down, I would have found myself rolled up in a couple of musty blankets.

Colonel Howard B. Lyon
Commander, 315th Troop Carrier Group

They had a first aid unit in a stable, and they put some of us in. We were lying on the straw. Americans, and also Germans. We didn't receive any medical attention there, that was to spend the night on the straw. I was in shock. Old Mother Nature sort of tides you over somehow. Next they took us to this German hospital, which had been a sanitarium of some sort which had been converted to a field hospital. It was not really a field hospital, but better than just temporary quarters. We were there from the 25th of March to the 30th of March, at which time we were liberated. I hadn't received any medical attention until the 29th, the night before we were liberated. They took me down to the operating room, where they had lines of patients waiting. The German doctor looked at my foot. He was picking out particles of bone and dirt, and whatever else, part of my shoe probably. My foot was beginning to look pretty bad. He was going to amputate. I said, "Is my foot gangrenous?" He didn't speak English, but I think he understood the word, and he nodded. So I said, "Can we wait another day?" We had been laying there listening to the Allied fighters, we could tell they were P-47s, and they were bombing and strafing all around the hospital. It was a nervous time for the patients. There was nothing we could do about it, you were just waiting for the next bomb to come through the roof. He nodded, 'Yes, it could wait. He didn't care, he had so many others waiting to be treated.

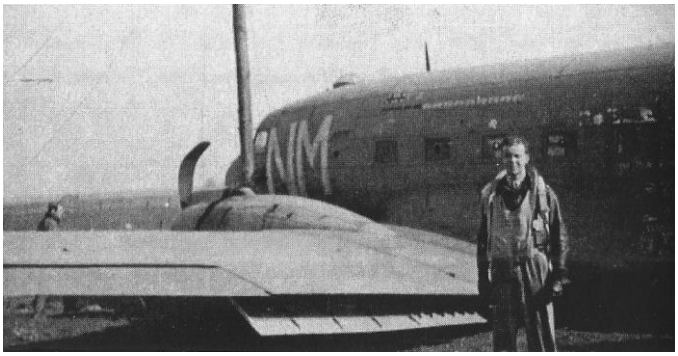
The next day we were liberated. The British came in, men of the 6th Airborne Division which we had dropped. First we went to a British clearing unit, which was a forward, advanced medical treatment station, just briefly. Then after that we were sent to an

American field hospital. The British station that we first went to was in a former castle. The story was that the British had moved in, and wanted to set up their hospital. They opened all the windows, took all of the furniture and threw it out, antiques probably. They quickly cleared it out so they could set up some cots and start treatment. That's when I was started on penicillin. The first cup of tea tasted so good.

Carl Persson, my co-pilot, was with me. He had his left hand amputated by the Germans because it was so bad. I saw Coggins and Burroughs there. Burroughs had jumped out. He had broken his leg on landing. The crew chief and the radio operator both bailed out, were not wounded, not injured but they were captured by the Germans and spent the rest of the war in a POW camp. They took one of those long marches that you read about.

The end of the tale there is that we had a reunion in Chicago, in 1982 and we were able to assemble my entire crew, except for the radio operator. He was alive and well, and I talked to him by phone, but he couldn't make the reunion. We had a wonderful time. That was the first time that I had seen most of them since we were shot down.

— End of Chapter —



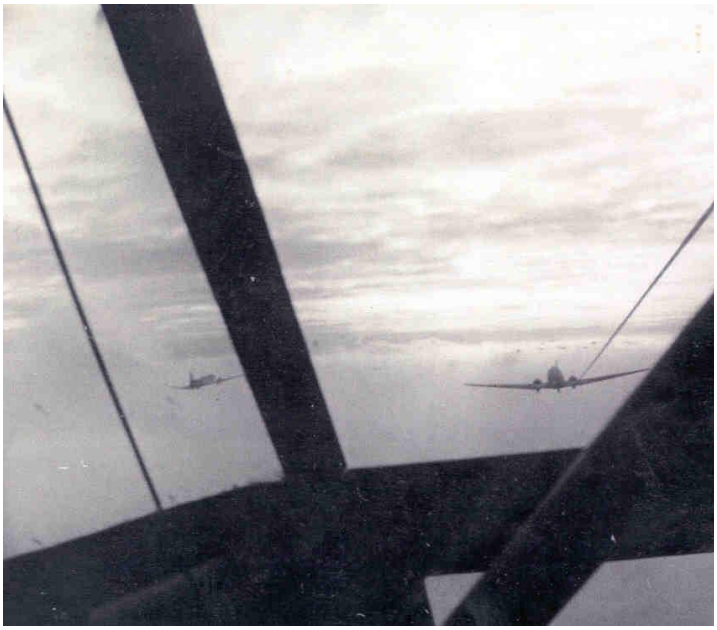
(Above) Rick Adams and his C-47. A close call – a few inches farther and the telephone pole would have torn the gas tank open. [Note "NM" designating the 34th TCS]. *Photo courtesy of R. Adams*

(Above) The crew of "Old 622": Technical Sergeant Oakey McKim, Radio operator; 2nd Lieutenant Charlie Lovett, Navigator, 1st Lieutenant "Ziggy" Zartman, Pilot, and the "owner", Crew chief Technical Sergeant Fred Drysdale. Photo was taken prior to VARSITY.
Courtesy of M. Zartman

(Above) British paratroopers loading 34th Squadron "NM" C-47. *Photo from https://315group.org*

(Above) British paratroops of the 7th Parachute Battalion, British 6th Airborne Division, at RAF Boreham preparing to board a 310th TCS "4A" C-47 for the Operation Varsity drop. Research by Chris Cornell of England

(See https://www.pegasusarchive.org/)



(Right) Photo from a 315th TCG glider being towed in training by a 315th Group C-47. Note – although 1,326 gliders were towed in Operation Varsity by other Groups, the 315thTCG did not tow gliders in combat

Photo from https://315group.org

(Left) CG-4A Waco glider belonging to the 315th TCG, 34th TCS. Standing if front are 34th TCS Glider pilot and also Glider Engineering officer Charlie Rex (on the right) and the Glider Engineering section. *Note* – the 315thdid not tow gliders in Operation Varsity.

Photo from https://315group.org