Chapter 6

THE CHANNEL CROSSING

— BRINSON'S HISTORY —

A final crew briefing was held at 2030; no major changes were made to the instructions issued earlier. The one serial (a word used by Troop Carrier Command to designate a flight of what was usually 36 to 45 aircraft) of the 315th was to be made up of 48 aircraft - each aircraft carrying 19 to 20 paratroopers [of the 82nd Airborne Division] and five or six parapacks of equipment fastened with shackles under the wings. There would be a lead flight of three planes followed by five "V of Vs" consisting of nine aircraft each. The leader of each nine-plane element was tot, fly 1,000 feet to the rear of the preceding flight. The wing element leaders were positioned 200 feet behind and 200 feet to the right and left respectively of the rear planes of the leading element. For night flying, this was not a loose formation.

The weather was not too good, but was not too bad. The skies were expected to be free of clouds over England at the altitude the formation would fly and only scattered clouds were forecast for the coast of France.

By 2130 most of the aircrews, paratroopers, and some maintenance men: had assembled by the individual planes parked on the hardstands surrounding the airfield. Some were making last minute checks of the planes and equipment; some talked quietly; other remained silent with their own thoughts. All were wondering about what might lie ahead in Normandy. The German forces had been working on "Fortress Europe" for almost four years; would it be as formidable as the enemy advertised it to be?

There was one group of men whose fate that June evening was not in Normandy, but at the base at Spanhoe. A few minutes before the aircraft were to be boarded, one of the paratroopers standing alongside Flight Officer Weston Harper's plane [309th TCS] dropped a grenade. It exploded and sprayed metal fragments in all directions. Two paratroopers were killed instantly and one died later. Fifteen others were wounded, including the aircraft radio operator

The plane received major damage and was pulled from the mission. The handful of paratroopers not wounded, and some who were, tried to get aboard other planes parked nearby at the same time that engines were being started and other planes began to roll to the takeoff position. It was reported that one or two succeeded. Such was their training and esprit de corps.

(Above) 315th aircrew men on the wing of the C-47 that was damaged by the exploding grenade. The aircraft was "cannibalized" for parts and used as an escape and rescue trainer. Note holes in the fuselage below the windows from the grenade fragments. *(Below)* 310th pilot Lt. John Rawls and Navigator Lt. Caldwell standing by a jeep with the grenade-damaged 309th C-47 in the background. *Photo from Airfield Focus 69: Spanhoe by John N. Smith.*

Ninety-four engines began turning over at 2250 and, in the order briefed, the planes slowly moved along the taxi strip toward runway 260. Six aircraft took formation position on the runway while others waited to move forward in their turn. Most base personnel not on the planes had an inkling that this mission might be what it happened to be and were assembling on the grass between the control tower and the active runway as if saying, "Good luck and Godspeed to all aboard." At 2306, with ten to fifteen minutes of daylight still remaining, the lead plane of the 315th, piloted by

Colonel McLelland, started down the runway. Each five-second interval thereafter another plane followed the preceding one. The pilots tucked the planes into formation as the serial made a wide sweep of Spanhoe at 1,200 feet before taking up a course for "Atlanta," the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing Assembly Point about 20 miles east of the Midlands city of Birmingham. There were two serials from the 316th Group just ahead of the 315th's planes, and seven serials from the 314th, 313th, the 61 st and the 442nd following dose behind. These ten serials of 386 aircraft carried the paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne to Normandy.

After darkness, the moonlight above became discernable through high scattered clouds and on the ground below specially placed light beacons marked the route to the coast every thirty miles. The formation flew southeast until it reached the head of the Severn Estuary, near Bristol, where it turned southward for Checkpoint "Elko." At Elko, the groups of the other two troop carrier wings moved into the stream at their designated time. After passing the coast over Portland Bill, a descent was made to 500 feet to delay discovery by German radar. Twenty minutes from the destination the jumpmaster on each plane was alerted and the formation began a gradual climb to 1,500 feet. An unexpected cloud bank was hanging over the western part of the Cherbourg Peninsula which required the 315th to climb a few hundred feet more to get above it and to change course slightly. As the cloud bank moved away from below the formation, the beacons placed on the drop zone by the Pathfinders were identified and shortly thereafter the "T" of green lights was sighted. (The "T," 30 by 20 yards, was lit shortly before the first serial arrived.) Ground fire was observed off to the right from what appeared to be the town of Etienneville and one flak burst struck a plane wounding seven paratroopers.-Speed was reduced to 110 mph, and four minutes before the drop, the jumpmaster standing at the rear of the fuselage received the red lights to stand up and hook up the parachutists to the static line.

As Drop Zone "0," about three quarters of a mile northwest from the village of Ste. Mere Eglise, was reached, the green lights signaling "Go" were switched on sending 816 paratroopers floating earthwards from the planes of the 315th. The time was 0203 hours, 6 June 1944.

Immediately after the paratroopers were dropped, the planes descended to 200 feet and maintained this altitude well beyond the east coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula and to the St. Marcouf Islands. Somewhere in these last; few miles over the mainland, a 309th plane was struck by machine gun fire coming from a house along the route. Lieutenant R. T. Slater, flying co-pilot was slightly wounded and the plane received some damage. Neither Lieutenant Orien Clark, the pilot, nor Sergeants Prentice Stucker and Rives Graham, the crew chief and radio operator, were injured. Another 309th aircraft, piloted by Lieutenant Rodney Bemis, received a burst of flak in the fuselage, wounding several paratroopers, three of them seriously. On the return flight, Lieutenant Bemis landed at the first English airfield he sighted to obtain medical attention for the wounded.

Climbing to 3,000 feet and returning over the Channel, the crew members were aware of the tremendous invasion armada spread out below- them and moving toward the Normandy beaches.

By 0440, 45 aircraft had returned to Spanhoe; the other two planes had, been reported as having landed at other airfields. Twelve of the C-47s had received damage from enemy fire. For the 315th aircrews, at least, what later became known as "The Longest Day" was over.

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THE CHANNEL CROSSING

— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

Captain Bernard Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

We went down to the flight line early and double checked everything. At this particular time I had a rare, interesting experience. I was curious as to just how these paratroopers, who in just a few hours were going to drop into the unknown, were reacting to the situation. It was real interesting to walk among the various airplanes which they were assigned to ride that night. They were at their planes, broken up into groups of 2 or 3, or 5 or 6. It was very interesting to see how they were reacting. Some were playing poker. Several were writing letters home, I assume to their girlfriends. And several were actually reading these little pocket Bible testaments which we had all been issued. In other words, each man was responding in his own particular way, to what lay ahead of him.

Finally, the signal was given to load up. Get ready .... we had already had one tragic accident there at the aerodrome. It happened just as we were loading up. One of the paratroopers dropped a Gammon grenade in the vicinity of his plane. Not only were several paratroopers killed, but the particular plane was so damaged that it was canceled out of the flight.

Major J. S. Smith
Operations Officer, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

It was late evening, June 6, 1944. I was the 34th Squadron's Operations Officer and not assigned to a designated crew. I wanted to go, so I bumped Bernie Pleasant's co-pilot and flew in his place. The paratroopers of the 505th PIR, 82nd Airborne, were clustered around the plane as we approached. The plane's wings and fuselage bore freshly painted two foot wide white and black stripes. A tall "NM" behind the cockpit windows proclaimed "34th Squadron". In a few hours, we, the crew, would flip a small toggle switch on the co-pilot's overhead panel. An eye-level green light forward of the cabin door on the port side would flash on. There would be shouts of" Go, Go, Go" as the troopers stepped into the dark skies over Normandy. With luck, we would fly home to our sanctuary in England. They would stay to fight.

Many of them sat quietly on the hardstand, each surrounded by what seemed equipment for a platoon. Words spoken were quiet, tense. A few paced back and forth. Others casually sharpened already razor edged knives. By the aircraft's tail cigarettes were lit, a puff or two taken, then stamped out by tightly laced boots. Blackened faces made individuals indistinguishable. This was our first contact with them. They had arrived on base a few days before in canvas shrouded trucks, then herded inside an enclosed fence as if they were too dangerous to roam. The base had been sealed since June 1.

At boarding time few of the waddling, gear-heavy troopers could manage the short steps on their own. "Get your ass up there," their buddies said as they pushed and hoisted. Aboard, they seemed to spill over the narrow bucket seats on each side of the crowded cabin. As we walked through to the cockpit their eyes followed us, staring white orbs in darkened faces, a singular sight never to be seen again.

Captain Julius H. Petersen
Pilot, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

We knew that history was being made that night, something you do once in a lifetime, but in the back of my mind there was a lingering fear about the coming next few hours. Fear, not only because it would be my first combat mission but the flight was so tough in itself. We were going out on a night formation flight. But still, everybody wanted to go.

One thing I always remember is the name of the town where were supposed to drop, Ste. Mere Eglise. They told us to keep radio silence and they also said that we were to drop them no matter what. If they wouldn't jump, turn around and do it again. They also said that if they don't jump the second or third time over the drop zone, and I don't think that anybody would want to do that, the crew chief should go back and place the paratrooper under arrest. I always had a laugh. You could see the paratrooper sitting back there with all this armament, hand grenades, rifles and knives, and everything, and who the hell is going to go back there and tell him he's arrested?

The sound of an explosion from the other side of the field did not make things any easier. It seemed to shake the ground a little bit. Somebody came by and said that there was an explosion, and that people had been killed over there. The paratroopers had those contact grenades and they were very powerful.

Lieutenant Colonel Henry Hamby
Commander, 310th Troop Carrier Squadron

This was our first combat mission as a group. I was more than a bit apprehensive, I was scared to death, but I couldn't show it. I couldn't show that to my troops. I'd go around and joke with them and carryon that it would be a piece of cake. But I was very frightened, strangely enough, until I got the plane on the runway. I pushed the throttles forward, and the fear left me. I guess something came over me and I said to myself, "I'm on my way now ... Okay, either I'm gonna make it or not." At that point all anxiety left me.

Technical Sergeant Russell Lane
Aviation Mechanic, 310th Troop Carrier Squadron

There were many airplanes lined up on the runway before the takeoff. It was pretty crowded and those first planes taking off didn't have a great deal of runway left with a full load on board.

It was approaching 11 0' clock and twilight was fading. Remember, they had double-daylight savings time and it didn't get dark until late in the

evening. A lot of people were gathered around the control tower to watch this and many of us stayed up all night waiting for them to come back. We had more or less been expecting it to come off. I, perhaps I should say we, all had thoughts about what could possibly happen to friends who were going on the mission

1st Sergeant William Nagle
310th Troop Carrier Squadron

It was twilight when the engines began running up, and I was watching from near the control tower. There were a lot of people there. After they started down the runway the word was out "THIS IS IT." Up to that point in time everything was very strictly mum.

The night that they took off, those planes, the engines, had a completely different sound, maybe because they were loaded. I remember talking to Bob Yeckley, the NCO in charge of Group Operations. I said, "Bob, those planes sound different than I ever heard them sound." He said, "Bill, this is it. They're dropping paratroopers in France tonight."

2nd Lieutenant Inez A. Leland (Mrs. Inez Glass)
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

During the early days of June, I came down with German measles of all things and was sent to an army dispensary. By that time the base had paratroopers living there, surrounded by barbed wire. Nobody, it seemed, could leave the base except me, accompanied by MPs.

On my third night there, many airplanes were flying overhead, and everybody in the hospital was asking, "What's going on?" They heard the planes and everything and they thought that I would know, and I said, "I don't know." We heard later that they had dropped the paratroopers. I was there a few days where I was watched and checked, and then I got out, and soon I was flying over to Normandy.

2nd Lieutenant Anna Beneshunas
("Queenie" Mrs. Anna Altemuse)
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

While stationed at the permanent RAF base, Cottesmore, the opportunity arose to go back to Spanhoe to visit some of the many friends we had made while stationed there. As we were ready to leave to return to Cottesmore, the airfield was secured and no one could leave. The next morning was D-Day, the invasion of France. While standing outside of the airfield, I stood watching the many squadrons take off. As each plane took off and got into formation with their squadron, they were joined by squadrons from other bases. The sky was filled with planes. They were our comrades and close friends taking off on their mission, which was to drop paratroopers at their hazardous destinations. My feeling of pride in being an American was never stronger as I watched our soldiers takeoff to become involved in the invasion of France.

Major J.S. Smith
Operations Officer, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

The takeoff run was long with the onerous load. Breaking ground, the plane responded sluggishly to the propwash from those ahead. The ebbing daylight was adequate to let us form up quickly. Strangely, the first portion of the flight was almost routine with the focus on holding position in the formation. Some talk about when it was best to put on the flak suit. The decision: the earlier the better. We located the snap-on chutes and silently wondered about the chances of finding one in the dark and getting out at 800 feet.

A weak moon hovered over the formation. The night wrapped around, us as it did the hundreds of like crews - yet the closeness inside the plane brought a sense of isolation. We were guided to "Flatbush" by light beacons on the ground. This was the shore point from which we launched over a moon reflecting English Channel. Now a tenseness seeped in.

Captain Bernard Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

I was flying deputy lead this particular night and would have been on the left wing of the flight of three that was leading the group. We had 48 planes five flights of nine each plus the three planes that were out at the front.

We had an unfortunate experience as we taxied out to takeoff. We ran off the taxi ramp and got stuck. Here we sat while everything else was out their taking off and we were in a mud hole. I said, "What are we going to do?" My pilot looked at me and said, "We're going if we have to go by ourselves." I replied, "That's the last

thing I want to do. Let's get out of this hole." We called and got a Cletrack, and it hooked up to the plane and was able to pull us back lip on the taxi strip. III the meantime our flight had taken off and was flying the prescribed route toward the DZ. Not wanting to go through to the drop zone alone I did a did a little figuring and made a cross-country short cut and we were able to intercept the group on the second leg.

While we were taking off there were groups from all over England in the process of taking off and heading to the continent of Europe. The Pathfinders who were supposed to mark the targets where we were supposed to drop had gone out earlier and were probably over the Cherbourg Peninsula.

Captain Robert Stubblefield
Navigator, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

My plane was equipped with Rebecca, the transponder that triggered the Eureka radio beacon set up on the ground by the Pathfinders. I didn't have very much time with the thing. I knew how to use it but that was about all. I had to watch a cathode tube and when the Eureka responded, a blip appeared in the center. My job was to the keep the pilot on course so that blip stayed centered.

I was navigating by dead-reckoning, and just when we were supposed to reach the Normandy coast, I left my seat and stood between the pilots. Looking out the window, I saw the white line of the waves breaking on the shore. I had kept my ETA and I kept my wind and my direction going in everything was running great. As soon as we hit the coast we turned on our heading to Ste. Mere Eglise and I went back in to the navigators' compartment and got on the scope.

Captain Julius H. Petersen
Pilot, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

The weather was quite nice. We had a regular planned route. It went past the Island of Guernsey, and we made a left turn and headed to the Cherbourg Peninsula. We crossed the west side of the peninsula, and just as we hit that coast, it socked in. We were on instruments from there, but we pulled up a little bit to 1,500 feet. It was right on the edge though and right away the cloud disappeared. We dropped down and got down to our dropping level, which was at about 5-600 feet. 1st Lieutenant Richard L. Adams Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron We didn't have any problems .... everything seemed to be going normal until we reached the coast of France. A layer of cloud moved in below us. We were at some 1,500 feet, and this layer of cloud moved just as we crossed the coast. All we had was those three formation lights on the wings and down the spine, and if you missed those it was dark. The formation lights were hooded-If you got out of your position, they were gone. That was it, that's all she wrote. If it wasn't a clear night you couldn't see them.

1st Lieutenant Jacob Mancinelli
Navigator, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

We went into those clouds for the last few minutes. Since I was in the: lead plane for our squadron, I was standing right behind the squadron commander. I said, "They may be able to see our wing tips, keep going because if we break now, I don't know where we are." He held on and the squadron held on. The clouds were there and everything, but apparently they tightened up to see the other planes. If one had gone into another, it would have been a real riot. We stayed on and just before we got to Ste. Mere Eglise, it broke open again, just enough to see the "T".

Then the problem was, unless you had timed your drop and done it visually, we would have overshot and missed it. But we had timed our drop and we had already turned on the red light signal for the paratroopers, and by doing that we dropped in the right place.

Captain Bernard Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

Now we ran into one of the major obstacles of the entire drop. There was cloud cover that we were going to have to descend through to drop level. The only lights we had on our planes were those hooded recognition lights. Going down through clouds at night in a 48 plane formation is not the most pleasant thing in the world. But, believe it or not, we were able to let down through this fairly thick cloud cover at night and retain our formation.

Major J .S. Smith
Operations Officer, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Time compressed as we made the final left turn toward the Cherbourg Peninsula and the drop zone. The French coast slid into view, a surf line marking the separation of land from sea. How could everything look

so peaceful? Then it wasn't as flashes split the sky off to starboard. Now over the land, a cloudbank rose ahead like a gauze curtain drawn across a stage. We climbed but still plunged inside to be encased in white fluff. Only momentarily, it seemed. When we started to slow to drop speed, the red light was toggled on, alerting those in the cabin to "get ready." We could feel the burdened troopers moving and hooking up. Through the headset the calm voice of our navigator said. "OK, I've got the signal." As a lead plane we had the welcome help of GEE [Gee, sometimes written GEE, a radio navigation system used by the Royal Air Force during World War II that measured the time delay between two radio signals to produce a fix, with accuracy on the order of a few hundred meters at ranges up to about 350miles]. It was "turn right," then "hold this course," more directions, and finally" dead ahead." The cloud was well behind us and there clearly visible on the ground was the "T," signaling to us with its isolated brightness from the blackout below. Flip that switch! This is it! Green Light. The plane lifted slightly as the troopers cleared, their static lines banging against the fuselage in the slipstream. A shout from the crew chief, " They're out!" They were gone and we didn't know a single name. It was just a stick of unknown paratroopers, joining hundreds of other sticks. But it was our stick and now they were floating down to Normandy, as were dozens of others. Troopers who jumped from planes above and ahead of us came swaying by, their chutes appearing like giant scattered snowflakes. It became a crazy obstacle course. When we were clear, we turned left toward Normandy's coast and pushed the nose down, seeking airspeed. Ground fire was all around. Tracers began soaring eerily over our starboard wing. Unless the gunner stopped firing or we stopped flying, we were sure to be hit. Neither happened and the bullets stitched their way across the wing. Minor damage, it was assessed later. It sure as hell wasn't minor at the time. We roared over the coast, throttles firewalled. Ahead of us was a Channel filled with ships, all kinds and sizes. We buzzed over the nearest ones scrambling for altitude, hoping they would ID our white and black stripes as a friendly. Time slowed back to normal; "Everyone OK?" There were affirmative nods and words, "yes, fine." We set up on the outbound course at prescribed cruising altitude and speed.

Captain Julius H. Petersen
Pilot, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were nine abreast. You had Smylie Stark leading it, he had two wingmen, and then you had two flights on either wing. Our flight was on the right, toward Ste. Mere Eglise, and I remember seeing the town very vividly because there was a fire down there and it was burning like a son-of-a-gun. It wasn't from the shooting, they just happened to have a fire.

I didn't see any flak, but my co-pilot, Gene Allen, afterwards said, "I don't want to go along sitting in a co-pilots' seat again, it was too scary." Let's be reasonable, everybody is scared and especially when you see that flak coming right at you. You're going to get a little nervous, but you were pretty damn busy. I was glad to be the pilot, you have something to do. The co-pilot had to just sit there. I remember that Gene Allen motioned to me to look out is window, "look what's coming up at us." I just said, "There's nothing we can do, Gene, but keep going." They really threw it up at us, but we didn't get hit.

We hit the "T" and headed back to England. We were on the right and we were turning left after we made the drop. Evidently we were flying into another serial. In fact we really had to kick rudder because I was getting too close to the other planes. We got out, and then we flew over the ships approaching the coast of Normandy.

1st Lieutenant Richard L. Adams
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

As I remember it, we were at about jump altitude. I was the number

three man of the number three flight, the "left end Charlie," which was probably good. When we broke out, I remember, the first thing I saw was a string of tracers. The ground fire was coming up, off of my left wing. It was the weirdest feeling I had in my life. The first thing that crossed my mind was that we had exhaust suppressors, and I thought that, "That mother's leaking." All of this was in slow motion. It really wasn't, but felt like slow motion. I could see them coming right through my left wing.

I had put my flak jacket on the seat instead of putting it on. I figured that I wasn't worried about getting it from the front, rather from below. The bullets hit the left wing tip and starting walking their way toward the engine. At that time I looked toward the

right and saw the "T" that the Pathfinders had laid. I headed for the "T," which was pretty much a right-hand turn. I left the fire behind me and slowed down. I was coming in at a pretty good angle and made a slight bank to the left. Right over the "T" I flipped on the green light. I dumped them out right over the "T".

I headed off and went on down, crossed the coast, and then out over the water. I didn't have too much trouble. I knew that the engine had been hit but there wasn't too much damage to it. I went on back to the base without any problem.

Lieutenant Colonel Henry Hamby
Commander, 310th Troop Carrier Squadron

We were some 10 to 15 miles from the DZ when I looked out the left window and started seeing some tracers. They were coming my way and they were falling short, all of them. I thought, "Hell, I'm satisfied, I'm all right, too far away." I didn't realize until somebody told me later that tracers were short and the other ammunition would go farther. I'm glad that I was sort of dumb about it. It was right about then that the cigar was shot out of my radio operator's mouth, just a few minutes before we hit the DZ.

When we got close to Ste. Mere Eglise, we picked up our Rebecca/Eureka [“Rebecca” a short-range transponder system used for dropping airborne forces, consisting of two parts – Rebecca (for Recognition of Beacons), airborne transceiver and antenna system, and Eureka (Greek meaning “I’ve found it”) ground-based transponder; Rebecca calculated the range to Eureka based on the timing of the return signals, and its relative position using a highly directional antenna] and it was just straight in as far as I was concerned. I didn't have to correct. We stayed right on the beam and went straight in. We picked up that beacon over the drop zone, I flipped on the green light, and out they went. All my planes were following me.

We dropped our troops over Ste. Mere Eglise exactly 40 minutes after midnight on D-Day [June 6, 44]. I gave them the green light to go. After we dropped our troops I headed north to take the squadron back to our base. With the bright moonlight it wasn't completely dark and we saw an awful lot of ships streaming toward Normandy. We knew it was on. Fortunately we did not have a repeat of Sicily. There were ships all over the place and none shot at us We were hit only that once, just before the drop zone. When we got back to Spanhoe we carefully looked over the rest of the airplane and there were no other holes in it, except for the one that came in on the radio operator's side.

Captain Bernard Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

An amusing sidelight, but it's not really amusing. Our paratroopers were delighted when we were getting ready to let them jump. They would rather be fighting than riding in an airplane over enemy territory. We were just the opposite, we wanted to get out of there so we could get back home.

Anyhow, once the paratroopers cleared the planes, we dived down towards the deck to pick up speed and get below the big guns, and headed out across the Cherbourg Peninsula until we were over water again. Once we got over the water, we turned and began our return journey to England. Right here and now, if I live to be a thousand years old, I'll never see a sight like I saw:that morning. The invasion fleet was on its way in. I don't believe that could have fallen out of the airplane and hit the water. I didn't know that there were that many ships in the entire world. There were ships of every shape, form and fashion. The English Channel was literally filled with their Above all of this were our fighters and all of our top-cover flying. It was a massive sight. Unbelievable! It made you wonder how ANYTHING or ANYBODY could withstand this force.

Anyhow, to make a long story short, we returned across the English Channel and went on back home to our own base, landed, went in and had our debriefing, and afterwards a most enjoyable night. It was enjoyable from the point that we were still alive, because anyone that says that they weren’t scared while all this was going on, well they're not completely truthful to themselves.

Captain Robert Stubblefield
Navigator, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

We climbed to about 8,000 feet to return to England and at that time that latitude it was getting light. When we were about halfway to England I could see the shores of England and the shores of Cherbourg and the thousands of boats with their little white wakes filling the channel from 'England to Cherbourg. From the other window I could see the C-47s towing their gliders. Those flights filled the sky from England to

Cherbourg. I can also remember seeing the clouds starting to build up over Cherbourg. It was an awesome sight and one that I naturally will never forget.

Flight Officer Arthur Stone
Glider Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

I don't remember which squadron I went with to Normandy but I do remember being scared all the time. My glider was carrying a jeep and eight men, a captain and a couple of sergeants and a few privates.

The night was pitch black but I had very good night vision. I loved to fly at night. I used to volunteer to fly on any night missions because I really enjoyed them. To look at something at night, you should never look directly at it. You let your peripheral vision pick it up and you can find your way in almost total darkness. When we were cast off, I spotted an open field.

There were two methods to land a glider. A lot of the men would do a "Blitz" landing, where you nosed it into the ground and slammed on the brakes. They had the "Griswold nose" on the glider, a set of beams, and you would slam it in and use it like plow on the ground to slow yourself down. Just putting the brakes on, that just wouldn't do it, the wheels would slide, just like a car on a wet pavement.

1 learned that the fastest way to get on the ground and with the shortest run was to put it into a stall. We had spoilers on the glider. All jets have them now, they rise out of the top of the wing, and that kills about 40 of your lift. You would be flying in your glider and you would put your spoilers on and just sink. I had a very short run in.

We raised the nose of the glider by hooking it up to the jeep and driving it forward. It worked fine. We all beat it out and headed for a hedgerow because there were Germans all around us.

Captain Julius H. Peterson
Pilot, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

Debriefing, there were a lot of happy people there because everybody got back and a double shot of booze too! That cheered everybody up a little bit. They always used to give a shot at the debriefing, but this was a little different Then we were stood down for the rest of the day. Oh yeah, everybody was happy we could go. That's one thing, everybody wanted to go.

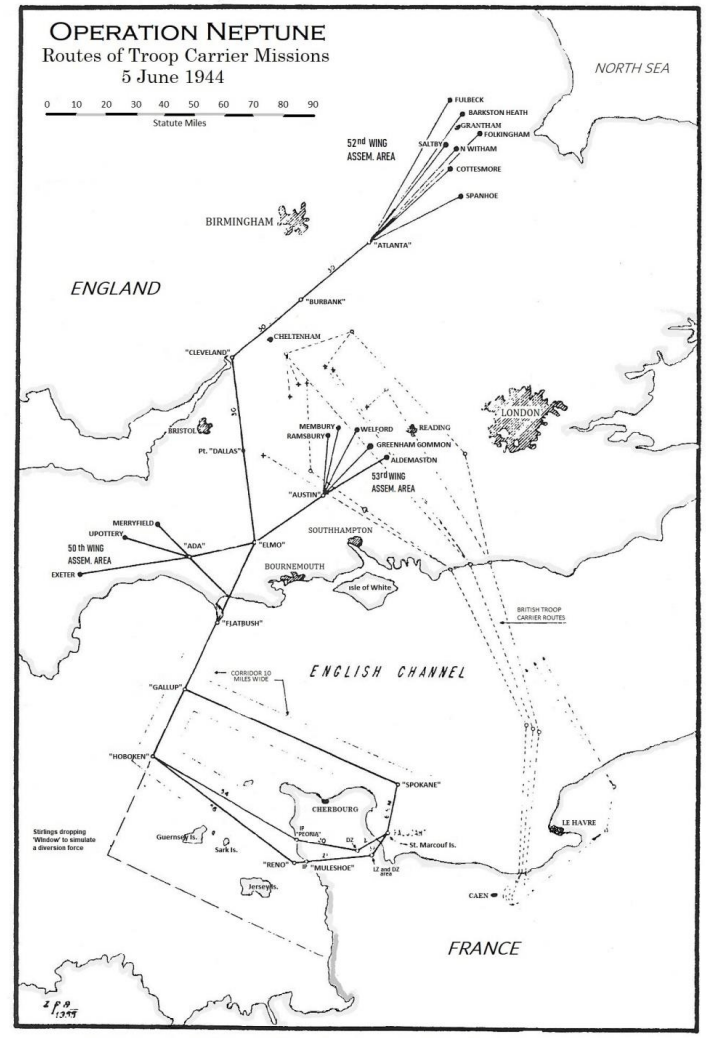
Major J.S. Smith
Operations Officer, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Spanhoe never looked so good.

Technical Sergeant Russell Lane
Aviation Mechanic, 310th Troop Carrier Squadron

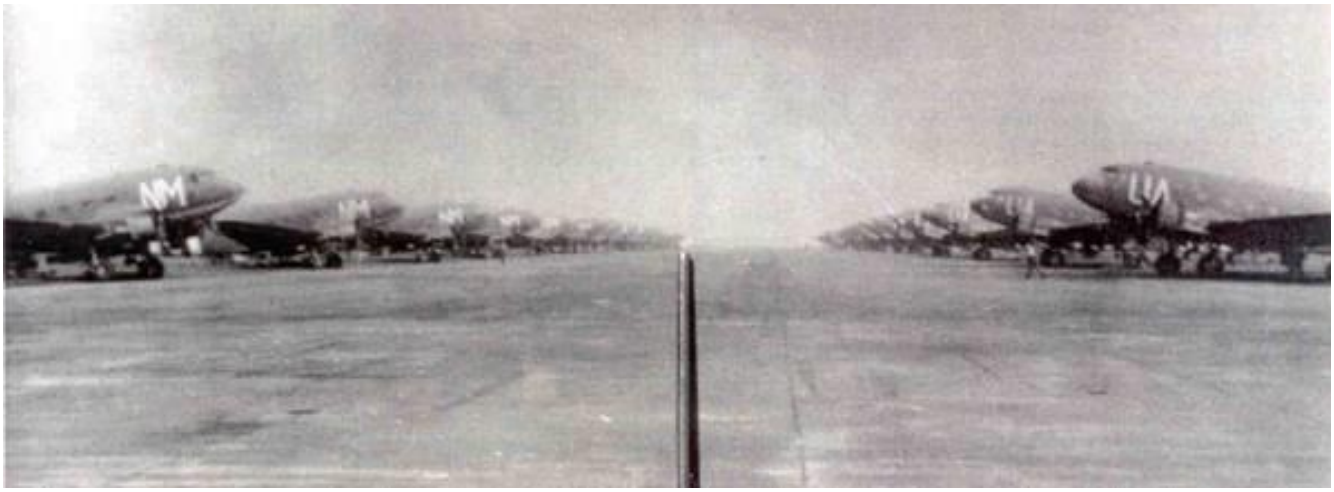
The night formation lights on the wings and down the fuselage, we had to replace a lot of the lenses. The crews forgot to turn them off after they landed. They just melted from the heat of the bulbs if you didn't turn them off after landing.

— End of Chapter—



Courtesy of USAF Historical Division, Air University, enhanced by Miles Hamby for visual clarity.

(Above) Map of troop carrier routes for operation "Neptune". The 315th TCG was at Spanhoe (lower spoke of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing in top right by the North Sea). The 315th departed Spanhoe on evening of 5 June 1944, flew SW to points "Atlanta', then "Cleveland", then S to "Elmo", then across the English Channel to "Gallup" and "Hoboken", then SE to "Reno" then E to the IP (initial point) "Muleshoe" then run-in to the DZ at Ste. Mere Eglise. Map copied from the original book.



(Above) Spanhoe flightline C-47s. (L) 34th Squadron "NM", (R) 309th Squadron "UA" *Photo from https://315group.org*

(Above) Cockpit of a 315th TCG C-47.
Photo from https://315group.org

(Above) 310th TCS C-47s on Spanhoe flightline. Note invasion stripes on second aircraft. These stripes were painted on the aircraft two days before the D-Day invasion on June 6 and remained for the rest of the war.
Photo from https://315group.org

(Above) 82nd Airborne Division "All American" preparing to board 310th Squadron C-47 ("4A"). Note top half of "Invasion Stripes" have been painted over since the Normandy invasion Operation Neptune D-Day June 5-6 1944. Photo from https://315group.org