Chapter 7

SUMMER OF '44

— BRINSON'S HISTORY —

For the 315th, the weeks following D-Day were at both ends of the spectrum. There were periods of feverish activity mixed with days of no flying at all.

On D+1, other groups in the 52nd Wing flew parachute resupply missions to the drop zone areas in Normandy, but the 315th was not scheduled. The weather over the central part of England on D+ 1 was unsuitable for troop carrier formation flying, which resulted in some flights returning to base. Those flights that pushed through found better weather along the south coast and proceeded to the drop zone area. Enemy ground fire was very heavy and the loss rate of planes at one DZ was over ten percent.

The next mission involving the 315th was WlLDOATS. This was a plan to drop the British 1st Airborne Division near Evrecy, France just before an attack by a British armored division. The route would require a night flight over more than 50 miles of strongly held enemy territory. The mission was to be launched on the 14 June and briefings were held on the 13th. On the evening of the 13th, the mission was postponed after a German armored division pushed back the British in the area of the planned operation. After WILDOATS was scrubbed, the base restriction, which had been in effect since before D-Day, was lifted.

On 22 June, forty planes led by Lieutenant Colonel Lyon flew south to the airfield at Ramsbury, where they were loaded with ammunition and went to Landing Strip A-I in the beachhead near Ste. Pierre du Mont. Some aircraft were fired on by Allied ships in the Channel, but none were hit.

There was no pressing need for air resupply while the Allied front was near the beaches where the supplies could be unloaded from ships and taken by trucks a relatively short distance to where they were needed. This situation, coupled with a shortage of available landing strips, reduced sorties to the Continent to a small number during the remainder of June and much of July. Most missions that were flown used the southern English airfields in the Berkshire and Wiltshire areas as on-load bases - most often, Greenham Common, Ramsbury, and Membury.

A different type of mission began on 23 June for 86 Group flyers Boarding a train in the nearby town of Stamford, this group went first to a personnel holding center at Chorley, near Crewe, where they joined men from other Eighth and Ninth Air Forces units to proceed to Liverpool. There the assemblage boarded the USS George Washington for 30 days of leave in the United States. About the same time, other crew members began receiving seven days of leave at Torquay, Devon, where the Air Force had established a rest camp. During other periods of limited activity, excursions went to the ancestral home of George Washington in Northamptonshire and Stratford-upon-Avon in Shakespeare country. Lieutenants J.D. Alexander and Maurice Dean, among others, volunteered their services as cultural guides on some of these outings.

Additional men were assigned to the 315th during the summer which caused a temporary housing shortage. Among the aircrew assigned to the 315th in July 1944 were:

34th Squadron - 2nd Lieutenants R. E. Cloer and C. E. Harris, Corporals T. E. Curtis and R. A. Ledoux

43rd Squadron - 2nd Lieutenants C. E. Colbath and J. A. Golden Corporals H. H. Cunningham and G. E. McCormick

309th Squadron - 2nd Lieutenants H.D. Liddle and E.J. Harris, L. J. McNab, and O. Molden, Corporals D. D. Wilson and J. S. Rosales B. N. Huntsinger, and B. C. Witt

310th Squadron - 2nd Lieutenant M. J. Baroody, W. H. Englund, W. H. Borneham, and R.T. Ford, Corporals W. C. Cooksey, Jr., D. T. Langlois, F. E. Faunce, Jr., and E. A. Bossong

Tents had to be set up in some of the living areas. Several navigators were assigned to medium bombardment groups - among them were Lieutenants Chapman, Germain, Mellgren, and Stubblefield. Lieutenant Chapman's departure meant the loss of the leader of "Chapman's Commandos," a dance band which provided music upon occasion for base parties. Captain Joe Schulman, the group dentist, moved up to the podium from first violin. Lieutenant Farese was killed months later when the B26 on which he was a crew member crashed. On another mission, Lieutenant Chapman was forced to bail out of his disabled plane.

Training with paratroopers recommenced - this time with the Polish Parachute Brigade. During one exercise, on the evening of 8 July, two planes from the 309th Squadron collided shortly after takeoff and crashed one

mile north of Easton-on-the-Hill, Northamptonshire. Corporal T. Chambers, a radio operator who was standing near the open cargo door of one of the two planes when the collision occurred, parachuted and survived, but eight crew members and 26 Polish paratroopers did not.

The 315th men were buried at the American Military Cemetery at Cambridge on the 10th. Some years later a plaque was placed in the church in Tinwell, just outside of Stamford, Lincolnshire which has these words: TO THE MEMORY OF 34 BRAVE MEN WHO FELL NEAR THIS PLACE JULY 8, 1944. The names of 26 Polish Paratroopers and the eight Americans are inscribed on the marker. Those killed from the 315th were: Lieutenant J. G. Leonard, Flight Officer C. S. Johnson, Lieutenant R. N. Vendetta, and Technical Sergeant B. A. Saling on one plane. Lieutenants L. L. Byrne, and P. D. Bray, Technical Sergeant R. G. Hoyt, and Staff Sergeant J. Dozier were on the second aircraft.

Another fatal crash took place on the night of 11 August. On a practice mission, a *C-47,* crewed by Lieutenant Perry, Lieutenant Ullard, Technical Sergeant Winston Brown and Sergeant Coulan, crashed near Waddington, Lincolnshire while executing a night dispersal plan. The reason for the crash was unknown. On the same night, planes piloted by Captain Robert Davis and Lieutenant Vance Pugh came together in the air; both planes landed safely.

When not flying, passes and short leaves were available for men to go to nearby towns or visit London. Much bicycling was done around the countryside on the long summer afternoons when darkness did not come until around 11 PM. Certain Public Houses became favorites and many a pint of "mild" or "bitter" was consumed by the thirsty airmen of the 315th. Local romances began to blossom during this summer of 1944 that later resulted in wedding bells for some.

In early August, the situation changed. The First Allied Airborne Army was organized under the command of Lieutenant General L.H. Brereton. This organization placed under one command both British and American airborne and troop carrier forces, and reported directly to General Eisenhower's headquarters, SHAEF.

New airborne operations were scheduled, but all were canceled. Once Allied breakout in Normandy occurred, the fast moving armored forces often reached the objective before the airborne mission could be executed, thereby obviating the need. TRANSFIGURE was a mission planned to trap the German Seventh Army south of Paris near Rambouillet, By 16 August, all planes were marshaled and prepared to go, but General Patton's tanks moved faster. BOXER was an airborne operation designed to capture the port city of Boulogne. It, too, was scrubbed from the board as were LINNET and COMET in late August.

By early September the rapid advance of the U.S. and British forces across France and into Belgium caused a need for rapid air resupply - a situation quite different from the one several weeks earlier. If the weather was flyable and if there were no stand downs for proposed airborne missions, Group planes, either loaded with supplies or cans of gasoline, began flying to fields deeper into the Continent. On 12 September, 75 planes from the 315th flew into Brussels, a location that had rapidly replaced Orleans as a European off- load point.

Crew members scheduled to fly on the resupply missions would arise before dawn, go to breakfast, climb on waiting trucks heading for the briefing room, and after being briefed on the mission and the weather, re-board the trucks and be taken to the planes positioned around the circumference of the airfield. The aircraft ground crews had arrived earlier to perform daily pre- flight inspections. On resupply missions, a crew seldom knew whether it would return to Spanhoe in the evening, or remain on the Continent, or be diverted to another on-load base in England. Such uncertainty as to where one would bed down required the "toting" of the bulky bedrolls. Beginning during this period and until the war was over, there appeared to be a shortage of unloading teams. As a result, the troop carrier crew members often unloaded the supplies from the aircraft at forward airfields. More than a few of these crew members developed "Jerrycan calluses" for the cans of gasoline handled.

In a conference of 10 September, a decision was made by Supreme Allied Headquarters to drop an airborne force in Holland. The mission of this force was to take and hold several key bridges. The most important bridge was one crossing the Rhine near the city of Arnhem. This operation, code named MARKET, was not canceled. Many wished later that it had been.

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SUMMER OF '44

— CHOLEWCZYNSKI'S "VOICES" —

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

We were with the airborne in Normandy for about ten days. After the fourth or fifth day, they put me in command of a squad. We were going out each day looking for parapacks that had been dropped, looking for ammunition and food, and to catch as many German snipers as we could, and there were a lot of snipers around.

When the airborne said that they didn't need us anymore, we went back to the beach and got on an LST. They had a bakery on the LST and we had white bread for the first time for a while. We were eating that white bread like it was cake.

Captain Bernard Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

The invasion was a success, and for the next few weeks we were involved in supplying the beachhead, and at the same time picking up wounded and bringing them back to the hospitals in England. We had air-evac nurses there and I must say that this was one of the greatest bunch of people I've ever known in my life. I don't how many lives were saved by our ability to pick wounded up off the Continent and get them back to hospitals in England shortly after they had been hurt, but it must have been a tremendous number.

The Allies began installing PSP (pierced steel planking) runways along the Normandy coast. We would fly our loaded *C-47s* across the Channel, land on the strip, unload, and pick up wounded to bring to hospitals in England. To care for them, we usually had an air evac nurse on board. I remember one particular runway that ran parallel to the coast. The approach was over the mouth of a river that produced a powerful updraft just as you leveled off for touchdown. On one occasion I was with Colonel HB Lyon. His nickname
was "Little General," a term never used to his face. During our approach, I began explaining about the updraft, only to be politely told just who was flying the plane. I shut up.

As we flared out, the updraft hit and the plane shot upward. Colonel Lyon reacted naturally and pushed the nose sharply down. We hit the runway with a resounding thud and an awesome bounce, followed by a series of lessening bounces.

While he fought for control, I began shouting, "Hold'er li'l General hold' er!" When things settled down he slowly turned, looked at me and asked, "What did you call me?"

I stammered, and told him I was so excited I couldn't remember. He knew I was lying, but graciously let the matter die. So much for my relationship with the "Little General."

2nd Lieutenant Evelyn Chaychuk (as spelled in her original orders, now known as Mrs. Evelyn "Chappy" Kowalchuk)
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

It was my second trip over the English Channel that day. We landed on an RAF strip to pick up the wounded. While we were waiting for the patients to arrive, we saw a dogfight overhead. In the distance shells were exploding and I could see the flashes from the guns being fired. The ground shook from the explosions and we had to take cover.

Some of the nurses slept in the ambulances but I was offered a foxhole by one of the British soldiers. His name was Captain Campbell and he was from Liverpool. He instructed me to get into a cot and to cover my head and chest with the wood board that was laying on the cot. It somehow slid over my body without touching me. I did as he instructed, except that I pulled my knees up to my chest into a fetal position.

Sleep wouldn't come. Twice Captain Campbell came by to ask if I was; okay. The explosions lasted well into the night. There was not a quiet, moment the entire night. People were moving about outside the foxhole talking and there were other loud noises.

Finally, morning came and I was waiting for somebody to call my name Captain Campbell came and put out a canvas wash basin for me to wash my face. I did, but there was no towel, so I wiped my face with my sleeves, and ran over to the plane which had already been loaded full of litters.

I never thanked the captain for his kindness, and I wish that I could now.

My commanding officer wrote my mother a V-mail letter, telling her about my experience and how brave I

was. My mother did not know what a foxhole was, and immediately went to church and said a Novena and said her Rosary three times that day; thinking that I was in a hole with wild animals. My brother-in-law finally explained to her what a foxhole was, and that I was safe.

There are times we never know who would do us a good deed, and I would still like to thank Captain Campbell and give him a big hug too!

Captain Bernard Coggins
Navigator, 43rd Troop Carrier Squadron

As the Allies began to break out of the beachhead, we spent the next two or three months carrying supplies and ammunition and whatever they needed to wherever they happened to be. General Patton's Army, in particular, led us a merry chase across France. We were not only carrying gas and ammunition but we also had to bring him maps. He was moving so fast that he was running off the maps. We had to bring them so he'd know where he was.

2nd Lieutenant Evelyn Chaychuk
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

We would usually wake up at 0530, and had breakfast at 0600. We'd then get our assignments and each flight nurse with her medical technician would go out to the flight line. In addition to flying with the 316th, which was based at Cottesmore, we also flew on the C-47s from the other groups in the wing, often with our old friends from Spanhoe in the 315th. From Cottesmore we would fly to the pickup point, frequently in southern England, then, the C-47 would be loaded with whatever we were taking to the Continent. After the plane landed in France or Belgium and was unloaded, the technicians would start setting up the stretcher racks and straps, often assisted by the local medical personnel and sometimes by the troop carrier crew chief or radio operator.

I will tell you, the triage team in the field did a fantastic job and carefully selected those that had to be put on board a plane because it was an emergency. It was quite a team, led by our flight surgeon, Captain Mills. We sometimes went back and forth as often as two or three times a day.

I also give a lot of credit to the medics in the field. They were wonderful If it weren't for them, the patients that we put on the planes would net have survived to reach us. We nurses had a curious effect on the hurt. We were usually the first women they had seen for a long time. Some of them thought we were their mothers or sisters or sweethearts because we were speaking American English.

Most of those boys were in casts because of wounds or spinal injuries. When we got them on the plane in a cast or traction, it was not like today where they have these fancy casts; and it was very uncomfortable for the boys: If it was a spinal injury, there was a cast that went from the neck down to his waist.

Some of those boys had their mouths wired dosed, with just enough of a gap so we could give them a cigarette or a straw for nourishment. Those patients wore scissors on a string around their necks in case they became airsick. We would cut the wires so they could breathe. Those were things that we never knew when we were in training, incidents and injuries that we never expected to face.

We would then fly back to Cottesmore, and on the field there were ambulances and jeeps with litters. If they were ambulatory, the patients went out on the jeeps and in ambulances to different military hospitals for further treatment.

2nd Lieutenant Inez A. Leland
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

I, like many people, had a little dog. He was a wire-haired terrier, and I got from my friend Major Gene Glass, whom I later married. Dogs, owned either by nurses or troop carrier personnel sometimes would go along on the flights with us. Mine was a good little dog and didn't do anything wrong, They even announced over the loudspeaker that we were ready to load and "don't forget the dog." Despite the fact that we were busy with people that were badly wounded, the dogs at times provided some comfort to the casualties.

2nd Lieutenant Robert E. Cloer ("Doc")
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We always left with our sleeping bags with us and our musette bags packed. It was like being a long-haul truck driver; and you never knew if you would be returning to Spanhoe that night .

You knew you would have air-evac the night before. You'd fly up to Wing Headquarters to pick up the nurses. You'd fly to Greenham Commons or some

damned place to pick up your jerry cans of gas. You'd off-load the gas and then go wherever to pick up the wounded. The gals would take care of them until they got to the hospital and then they'd work all night on them in the hospital.

2nd Lieutenant Evelyn Chaychuk.
8I8th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

My training to become a registered nurse in Newark did little to prepare me for what I had to do in Normandy. Even the worst emergency room cases could not compare to the injuries we encountered on the beaches. Every airstrip bulldozed out of the sand that we landed on had the same stench of death. The pace drained the heart and soul. Despite the fact that we were given a day off after a mission to rest, you couldn't sleep, you had seen too much. It was so vivid that you couldn't get it out of your mind. During training they never told you about the real war and the young men with their arms and legs shot off. We would pack every corner of the plane with wounded and you could see fear, pain and confusion on their faces. They had often come straight out of high school, Boy Scouts and football heroes, and found themselves in the slaughterhouse that was Normandy.

But that was why we were there, for them. There was a patriotism among all of us and we were proud to serve. Thoughts of family and home and the comradeship of our fellow nurses did help to soothe an overburdened psyche

2nd Lieutenant Inez A. Leland
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

I remember once, in Normandy, we were carrying a mixed load of wounded, American paratroopers and German prisoners. Things became a little tense when I was taking care of the POWs. I talked to them even if they didn't understand a word, to let them know that we wanted to help them. There was some angry grumbling ard whispering among the paratroopers and I could feel their very real hostility toward the people who hours earlier had been their bitter enemies. This just didn't happen to me but to other nurses also. We were trained as nurses· It didn't matter who, if somebody was suffering, you took care to ease the pain - that was part of it.

2nd Lieutenant Robert E. Cloer
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

It was frustrating sometimes during that summer of 1944. We'd be in the planes, engines running, and we would get the word to shut down. Another mission canceled. Then the four-by-fours came by picking up all the pilots and navigators and there would be yet another briefing, because Patton had. moved so damned far that the inforj11ation they had the night before was; obsolete. Navigators would be given grid coordinates. We'd fly to where we were going and it was usually farmer~' fields. You're looking for a place to land. Engineers had gone in and checked for mines and they would then large lay "L" shaped canvas panels in the opposite corners of the field, and that, marked where it was safe to land. You'd land, and then get the hell out of there as soon as you could, because there was going to be another group of aircraft coming in right behind ours.

2nd Lieutenant Irving Sternoff ("Jake")
Pilot, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

The only briefings I remember dearly were when we were supposed to drop to the north of Paris, and General Patton, driving up from the south passed the city and drove on eastward. We had been briefed three mornings in a row, I believe, and when Colonel McLelland said, "Gentlemen, you won't have to make this drop, General Patton has bypassed the city." Everybody let out a cheer.

2nd Lieutenant Robert E. Cloer
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

We landed at a field and right away I could tell something was different. In the near distance was a jeep and a weapons carrier, all spotless, with stars on a plate on the jeep's bumper. They were nothing like the weary trucks we usually saw waiting to haul away our cargo. Everybody around the vehicles was dressed like they were coming out of a staff meeting, with polished boots, lacquered helmets, and forest green shirts under the officers' pressed field jackets.

A figure in a shiny helmet and an ivory-grip six-gun in a holster was peering into the C-47s ahead of mine and was bawling out the aircrew. As soon as I saw his silhouette I knew who it was right away.

He came up to my plane, I was standing there braced at attention and saluted. He didn't return my salute and stuck his head in the cargo door. We had just

landed and hadn't started unloading yet. I don't remember whether we were waiting for the transportation guys or not ... we usually didn't have to wait for them too long. We usually just started putting the stuff on the ground and took off. "WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU GOT?" I said, "I have C- rations, sir." "GODDAM IT! ALL I WANT IS GAS AND AMMUNITION! WE'LL GET ANYTHING TO EAT WHEREVER WE'RE GOING!" He went to the next plane and chewed the crew out, as if we had anything to say about it.

I went over to the jeep, a little put out by my brush with "history." There was a sergeant behind the wheel, and a lieutenant sitting in back. While General Patton was going to yet another plane to chew them out, I struck up a conversation with the lieutenant. "We can't understand how you guys could go so damned fast through here." "Well, the Old Man won't let anybody get behind him. They're all so afraid of him and they want to stay ahead of him. If he needs to cross a river, he'd swim across and shoot any sonovabitch that wouldn't follow him." The lieutenant was a heck of a lot nicer than his boss.

1st Lieutenant William Bruce
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

On August 10, 1944, all 315th Group combat crew members took part in a big review at Leicester. Generals Eisenhower and Brereton were there, and after the 82nd Airborne Division passed in review, we learned we were all now part of the First Allied Airborne Army. We were promised some work whish- "everyone will welcome after the monotony of the past two months according to the brass.

The 315th men stood by the reviewing stand and did not pass in review During the first part of the proceedings Ike jumped off the reviewing stand and inspected the men of the 315th and the other troop carrier groups in attendance. He questioned about every fourth person and asked them how long they had been overseas. He also chewed them out because they were not wearing an ETO ribbon. I don't think any of the 315th had an ETO ribbon on.

Technical Sergeant Larry Ison
Radio Operator, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

Eisenhower went down the rank behind mine, and stood right behind me his back was touching mine. He was facing Tom Houston, and he said. "Soldier, you are serving your country. Aren't you proud of it?" "Yes sir "Where is your ETO ribbon? You should be proud to wear that and you should put it on." Then Eisenhower walked on. If he had faced me, he would have chewed me out. We didn't put those things on, theater and good conduct ribbons. We thought it was showing off. We would wear our wings, but we knew we were in the European Theater.

2nd Lieutenant Robert E. Cloer
Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

As we made those supply flights in to support Patton, Bradly Montgomery, etc., we were met a good share of the time by quartermaster transportation outfits. These were manned by black troops and often they were real characters.

The area around Rheims, France was well known for its champagne and cognac, as we found out on our RONs there. One day right after we first started going into Rheims, we were met by one of these truckers. He was there to get one of our loads, but he had many boxes already in the back of his six-by-six. We checked and found out they were cases of champagne. We bargained with him and finally got him down to $5 per case, and thought that we had a real bargain!

Later we found out that Patton's troops had overrun this large underground wine cellar that was full cognac and champagne that the German Army had taken for their use. All of the bottles were stamped across their labels "FOR WEHRMACHT USE ONLY" in German. Patton did not want any of his troops to have any of it and he gave orders to load it all on the trucks. The drivers' instructions had been: Throw a case on each plane that brings in supplies!

That truck driver made out pretty good that day, with our great bargain.

Some of the other outfits did get a case thrown onto their planes but it goes to show you, you can't get ahead of an American GI!

Sergeant Leonard Zurakov
Radio Operator, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

I was a radio operator on the 309th and the following story took place in the spring of 1945, before we left England for France. I have tried and tried but never was able to find anyone else who remembers this.

Anyhow, one morning three planes from the 309th were loaded with crates of pigeons!. How many, I don't know, but there were plenty. My pilot was Captain J.D. Liddle and he led the gang. We were supposed to take these to a forward base in France. When we arrived at this base, we tried to find someone who could take the bloody things off our hands. After hours of talking and trying, no one would admit to knowing anything about them. So, we had to take them back to England. Since it was already late, we decided to stay overnight and go back in the morning. We unloaded the crates of pigeons and tried to sleep in the plane. That was a big mistake. The feathers that had been cast off by the pigeons filled the air and kept us awake most of the night

We flew back in the morning. I reported what had happened. The C. O. was outraged and insisted that we take them back again that same day! So we went. Again, the same story. No one knew anything about the pigeons and despite Liddle's screaming, we still couldn't find anyone to take them off our hands. So, one more night in France, only this time we left the birds inside and slept on the ground outside. I believe we had sleeping bags, but I'm not sure about that. Once again we flew back to Spanhoe and once again the C. O. refused to take no for an answer, and sent us back to France again. This time Liddle was really angry and raved and ranted until someone finally got in touch with SHAEF. Sure enough, someone there knew about it and he even wanted to know why he had to wait three days for his pigeons. It seems that they were supposed to go to General Patton, who was going to use them to carry messages.

Captain Robert Stubblefield
Navigator, 309th Troop Carrier Squadron

There was a night practice drop with Polish paratroopers and I was scheduled to fly with Lieutenant Leonard and his crew. A few hours before I was told by Tannoy to report to Colonel Lyon. He told me, "They won't need a navigator tonight and I want you to fly with me. I want to observe the formation. "

As we were forming, we could see that the weather was very rough. I was standing between the pilot and co-pilot, checking my position against I chart - doing the pilotage from that position. Looking over HB's shoulder, my saw two planes lock wings and go to the ground. It was odd, but I did not hear a sound.

Colonel Lyons told me, "Get that position. We have to go back to the base, get a jeep, and get back here." I marked the location. We got back to the base and I navigated us back to the crash site. Navigating on the ground in England is not very easy with all the branch roads running in all directions with forests and fields in between. The roads were narrow and often lined with trees but we did get to the crash site. The ambulances were already there and the British medics were taking the bodies out of the plane. They were trying to pull one of those planes apart with a cable attached to the bumper of a truck. Colonel Lyon talked to the crew from the American ambulance which was there at the time.

The thing that I remember most was the smell was just terrible. It almost made me sick, the smell of the broken bodies. They were all broken up, all of them. The British medics were right in there, pulling them apart, putting them in blankets, carrying them out, and lining them up on the side. It was getting dark around that time, even though it was July. I still could not believe what I had seen in the air over Tinwell, the two C-47s locked together and falling.

There was only one survivor, a corporal. I spoke with him the following day. He was going to go pee and the relief tube was in the back end of the plane before the tail. When he said something about that, the guys up front said, "Hey, put on a parachute cause you're going to go past the open door in rough weather." Just as he got to that open door, the planes collided. He just jumped and pulled his ripcord and he was the only one of the bunch that was saved.

Flight Officer David Trexler
Glider Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron

I always described the treatment of us glider pilots in our squadron as benign neglect. They didn't give us any jobs except once when we were in France. We built some paths with rocks and stuff In England, for heaven's sakes, except for those flights in C-47s occasionally, we didn't do a damn thing. We couldn't be Officer of the Day because we weren't commissioned. We could do damned near anything we wanted. One day, for heaven’s sake, I remember I did 60 straight liberty runs to Leicester. Unless you requested to be put on as a co-pilot, they would use all power pilots. The power pilots that I flew with, they were fully accepting of us as pilots and even let us do landings from the right seat and stuff like that.

A lot of those later Troop Carrier units formed in the States went overseas together with their glider pilots. They were absolutely and fully part of their respective squadrons as far as I can determine. That seems to be the case with all those people in the "400" groups, where glider pilots were part and parcel of the units when they were raised. I had a lot of friends in the glider program, and they were absolutely part of their unit. I think particularly in the 315th the glider pilots were replacements. I arrived in September of 1944, and the 315th had been overseas damn near two years. We glider pilots were sort of orphans, probably due to the fact that the 315th never towed gliders in combat.

2nd Lieutenant Inez A. Leland
818th Medical Aero Evacuation Squadron

We had been making trips to Normandy and bringing back wounded for over a month when Vivianna Cronin got word that her little brother, who bad rheumatic fever, was becoming critically ill. I suggested that she ask Major Dornberger if she might be sent on an evacuation flight home to visit with him for a while. The major managed to make arrangements and, though worried, Viv was delighted. We girls had a long shopping list of things that we needed from the States and she happily promised to fill it.

Rather than seeing her young brother again, she arrived in time for his funeral. She did spend time with her parents and sister, and managed to call my mother and had a long talk with my family.

I was reclining on her bed one day when Alice Krieble came up to the room. I could tell by the look on her face that something was terribly wrong I asked, "It's mama, isn't it, Krieble?" She shook her head no, and then I asked if it was Vivo Treble then uttered that Viv's plane had crashed in Scotland, hitting four houses and that everybody on board had been killed.

My heart just sank. What could we do? Our hearts were so heavy. Major Dornberger called the entire squadron together and explained that we would have to go on flying no matter what happened.

Viv's boyfriend, Gene, was there. He was a great comfort to many of us that had been left behind and his commiseration was reciprocated. I believe that God is good and that he had been with us all this time. We thanked Him that someday we would see our beloved Vivianna again.

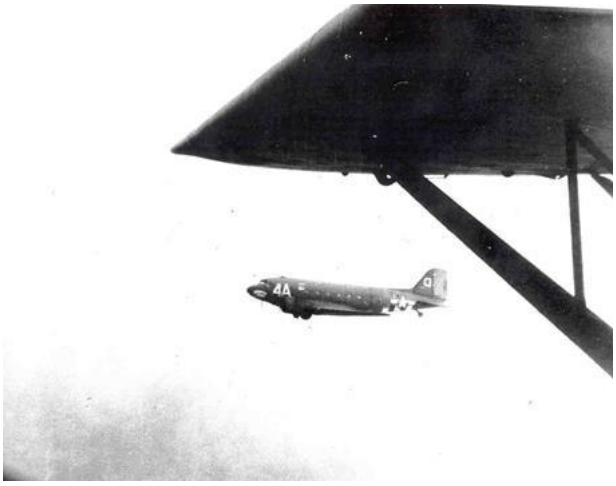
The funeral was one of the most difficult I have ever attended. There were three services, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. We all had to stand at attention and, at the end of the third, they played "Taps." It was almost more than I could bear as we were not allowed to move a finger to wipe our tears or blow our noses.

Right after Viv's death I got in touch with her mother. She was such a dear lady and said that things were very hard for her, but they were making it and she was sure that there was a reason that things happened the way they did. However, just a few months later I got word that Viv's father died from a heart attack. It was all so sad - the woman had lost three of her family in such a short time. I mailed the medal we received from the French military at our reunion in Virginia to her sister, Agnestelle Lennon. At times such as these we must gather our strength and realize that nothing is out of God's control, and we must trust Him more and more as life goes on.

— End of Chapter —

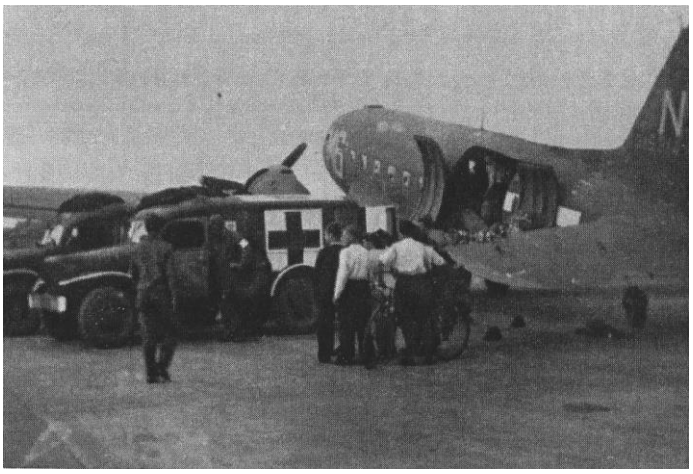
(Above) Your first stop, Cottesmore, pick up a flight nurse and medical technician if an evacuation is scheduled. Then, to a depot to pick up what they need on the other side of the Channel - be it beans, bullets, or blankets. Patton calls, Troop Carrier hauls. *R. Cloer*

(Above) To a forward field in France, and unload quick - there are more C-47s coming in behind you! This photo was taken in August, 1944, at Orleans. The 34th Squadron bird still has its full D-Day stripes, and even the D-Day chalk number to the left of the cargo door. (Brinson). *Photo courtesy of W. Bruce*



(Above) 310th "4A" C-47 "Umptie-Poo" towing a CG-4A Waco glider (out of frame) in training flight; taken from a glider in tow (note CG-4 Waco glider wing struts)..

Photo from https://315group.org



(Above) If you have wounded on board, get them to a field in England where the Medical Corps takes over. Then you can go home to Spanhoe, and wonder if the operations officer will again shine the flashlight in your face before dawn. (Brinson). *Photo courtesy of Dave Benfield*

(Above) This photo is evocative of the beginning of the Troop Carriers' day. The operations officer went from bunk to bunk with a flash light, giving the sleeping air crew the news that they were flying that day. They load onto the four-by-fours that will take them to operations where they will get their assignments. Everybody has their bed rolls and musette bags with them, not knowing when they will return to Spanhoe *(Brinson).*
Photo courtesy of Robert "Doc" Cloer

(Above) 34th Squadron personnel and their pet dog in front of the 315th Group Engineering office.
Photo from https://315group.org

(Above) H.A. Moore (34th Squadron flight crew member) tending his "Victory Garden".
Photo from https://315group.org

(Above) 309th "UA" crew member (unidentified) before C-47 "Buck+Kid"
Photo from https://315group.org

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