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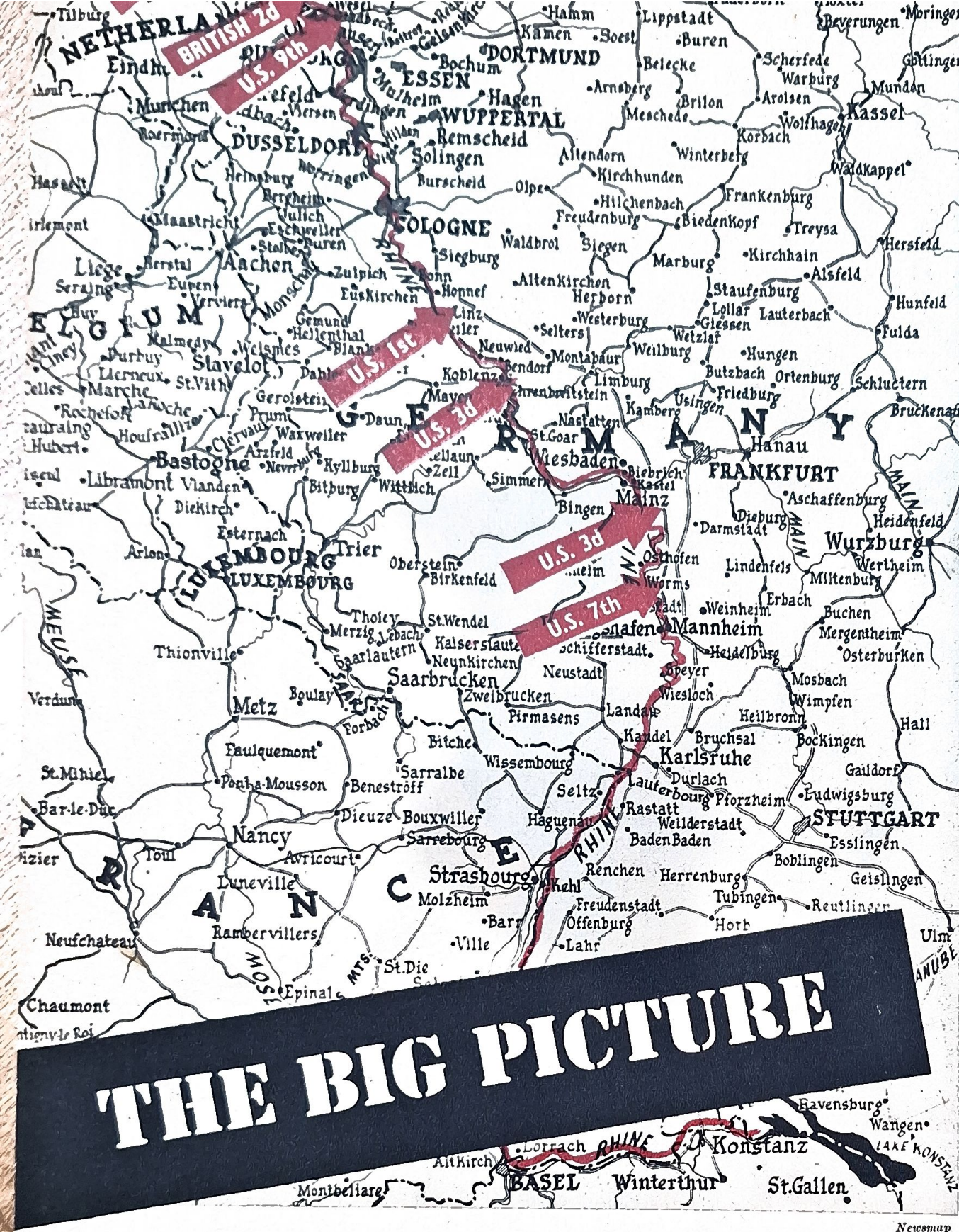
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*By the men... for the
men in the service*

ARMY NURSE

Sailors in ODs Helped the Army Cross the Rhine River

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THE crossing of the Rhine River got the same kind of careful planning as that given the preparations for the Normandy invasion. There was the precise co-ordination of H hour for the ground forces, and P hour for the paratroopers. There was the Navy to handle the larger assault craft and the Air Forces to pound the enemy in the assault area and to isolate the battlefield by cutting rail lines and roads. There was field artillery instead of Naval big guns to pick out and destroy specific strong points, and there were the spearhead forces carefully trained in amphibious operations for weeks before the crossing.

Actually, the battle of the Rhine crossings began at Remagen on March 7 when the First Army's Ninth Armored Division swooped down on the rail bridge there and seized it before it could be destroyed. But the crossing tactically was of secondary importance. It placed the First Army in the position of being on the far side of the Rhine with no place to go. The terrain to the east was difficult, to the north heavily defended and to the south, at the moment, without point. However, it proved its value later on when the really big battle got under way.

Next came the crossing south of Mainz on the night of March 22, a full 24 hours before the big jump was to be made farther north. Without any of the previous preparation taken by the Ninth U.S. and Second British armies, without even any previous artillery preparation, the Third Army's 90th Division stormed across the Rhine in infantry assault boats and established its bridgehead against light resistance. The big jump-off came the following night. Far north of the Third

Army bridgehead, members of the First Commando Brigade of the 2d British Army, crossed the river north of Wesel. Their objective was the enemy strong point in that town. They were to take the town if possible, and if not, to encircle it, to isolate it from the battlefield before enveloping it. They had 37 casualties in the landing and occupied the town.

Four hours later, at 0200 hours Saturday March 24, the Ninth Army jumped off south of Wesel, while British Second Army spearheads crossed from Xanten north of Wesel. The U.S. 30th Infantry Division and the 79th Infantry Division spearheaded the Ninth crossing, each sending three battalions across in the initial assault. Total casualties in the initial crossing were 31 men.

Then at 1000 came the airborne operation. Paratroopers of the 17th U.S. Airborne Division, which had fought as infantry to help stop the German counter-attack in the bulge, began jumping into their drop zones northeast of Wesel at that hour, with the Sixth British Airborne Division jumping just north of them.

The mission of the airborne was to secure the high ground from which artillery could be directed from German OPs against our bridgeheads. They were also to provide a link-up between the Second British Army and the Ninth U.S. Army east of Wesel. Thereafter they were to go under the command of Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson's Ninth Army.

The 17th dropped into an area dotted with enemy ack-ack positions and had it rough, particularly the glider borne infantry. However, they were able to organize and achieve their initial objectives—securing the high ground—within three and a half hours of the first jump.

Credit for the low rate of casualties in the actual crossing in large part belongs to the First U.S. Army. Its bridgehead at Remagen had been drawing German strength southward from the area chosen for our landing operations. At least two enemy armored divisions and four infantry divisions which might have been on the banks of the Rhine at Wesel to oppose us instead had their hands full trying to contain Gen. Hodges men.

BACK of this was the weeks of preparation that went into readying the operation. In deepest secrecy, the Navy moved into Belgium and Germany to prepare its part. It was the first time that our Army had called on the Navy for help in crossing an inland waterway and the first time that the Navy had gone into action 200 miles from the nearest salt water.

In the actual operation, the waters of the Rhine were dotted with LCMs, LCVPs, DUKWs and Buffaloes, invasion craft that had been borne up to the Rhine under a heavy smoke screen. Picked men from the 30th Division and the 79th Division were given specialized training in the handling of some of these craft, while Naval personnel manned the larger boats. Both divisions were moved back for a period of amphibious training on a small stream near the Roer.

Perfect flying weather before and during the first days of the operation contributed much to its success. On Saturday, the day of the airborne landing, at least 10,000 missions were flown, mostly against targets concerned in the Rhine crossing operation.

Earlier, the Ninth Air Force had carried out a carefully drawn plan for the isolation of the battle area, smashing bridges on railroads and highways many miles back from the Rhine to prevent movement of reinforcements into the battle zone and the successful withdrawal of Nazi forces. Air fields within fighter range of the area also were hit.

Just before the Ninth Army jump-off, the heaviest concentration of artillery we have ever used began laying down a barrage on the far side of the Rhine. The weapons ranged from 240mm. howitzers to 105s. There were 1,600 troop carrier planes used by the British and U.S. forces and 1,400 gliders. For the first time C-46 Commandos were used in an airborne operation. These carried 36 paratroopers, and permitted them to jump from two doors instead of 18 men carried by the C-47, jumping from one door. The mission also used for the first time gliders in double tow.

ONCE the bridgeheads were established, the drive to break through the crust of German defenses got under way. Down in the south, in the Third Army territory, there seemed to be no crust. The bulk of German forces in that area had been mopped up west of the Rhine, and there was little to hinder the advance of Gen. Patton's forces.

They swept through quickly to Frankfurt and beyond, crossing the Main River and advancing steadily eastward. The First Army broke out of the bridgehead at Remagen. Then it swung south and east, by-passing the worst of the wooded hills east of the bridgehead area and advanced to Limburg, Wetzlar and beyond.

Then the Seventh Army crossed the Rhine in the Mannheim area and advanced to the Main, where it made junction with the Third. Up north, the British broke through between Bocholt and Dorsten, east and north of Wesel, and air observers in that area reported that the Germans were in rapid retreat.

The MARSHALLING AREA

By Cpl. BOB KRELL
YANK Staff Correspondent

AT 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY MARSHALLING AREA IN FRANCE—"Keep straight ahead and you'll come to the loading platform about a quarter of a mile down the road," said the MP. And he waved our truck on into the darkness with his flashlight.

The loading platform was along a railroad siding about a 100 yards from the main line. It was a long piece of track, and the American box cars on it seemed to stretch for miles into the black night.

It was crowding 2100 hours. Two hours ago, as darkness fell, huge semi-trailers carrying as many as 75 soldiers with full field equipment pulled out of the garrison area and moved to the waiting train. The latter was on a siding for security reasons. And all the men had removed the Eagle's Claw insignia of the 17th Airborne Division from their clothing so that anyone who did see them loading could not identify them.

Our car was about eight feet wide and 24 feet long, with doors on either side. When we left the siding, both doors were open. We closed them, but it was still cold. We threw our blankets on the wooden floor and huddled as tightly as possible in the corners to stay out of the draft that blew in from around the doors. We were ten in our car; none of the others were overcrowded either; none had more than 12 men. This was a priority special, this rattler, and only parachutists could get tickets.

It's hard to sleep on the cold, wooden floor of a box-car. The clickety-clack of the wheels over the tracks aren't as soothing as they are on the Broadway Limited. So you roll and toss.

★ ★ ★

The clickety-clack is gone now but the overpowering roar of the C-47s being pre-flighted has replaced it, and sleeping in the marshalling area isn't much better. C-47s from all over England are massing at different airfields in France and this is one of them. The huge troop carriers come in at all hours of the day and night. Once they land, they are lined up in long rows, and some are less than a hundred yards from where the men are sleeping—or trying to.

Your feet are freezing, or anyway you think so. And the plaintive bitching of the others in the tent tell you that your buddies think they are suffering the same fate. You roll over and try to catch a few more winks, but the cold and the planes make it impossible. So you kick off the covers and get ready for your first day in the marshalling area.

★ ★ ★

There are three distinct phases in a marshalling area operation. The first is the movement from the garrison to the air field. The second involves the briefing of all officers and enlisted personnel and a final inspection of all equipment. The last step takes place when the men fit their parachutes and load the ammo, guns and other equipment in the parapacks from which they will be released during the attack.

As we go through these phases we couldn't ask for better weather. It is warmer now and a hot sun beats down. Some of the men are shirtless, some have taken off their pants, and some have taken off everything.

Working or loafing, there isn't too much wise-cracking among the men. To many of them this is no new experience. A lot of them went through the same thing on D-Day with the 82d Airborne. All but a few are veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

★ ★ ★

Pfc. Walt Leonardo of East Palestine, Ohio, is busy tying the base plate for his mortar into his bundle. He runs out of rope and after the usual argument, Pfc. Paul Hines of Harlem goes off to get some.

While they wait for Hines to come back, Cunningham points to Leonardo and says: "There's a guy with a real TS tale."

Leonardo, a D-Day and Bulge veteran, doesn't say anything. He just grins. He's a sawed-off guy with a bushy mustache. His skin is Latin-dark and when he smiles he flashes out a set of toothpaste-ad molars.

Loaded with men and equipment, some of the planes in the airborne armada pass over a German town.

"I guess I did get a bit of a screwing," he says. "Three days ago they tell me to pack my bags. I'm going to the States for a furlough, they say. Now it seems like I ain't going to the States."

He thinks it over for a minute, and then adds: "But hell, I ain't got too much kick coming. Look at Walley, there. Three years in the Pacific, and he comes back home and joins the parachutists. Then he has to go AWOL for five days so he can get married before coming overseas."

Pfc. Ralph Walley of Little Rock, Ark., had a short comment about his marriage.

"They fined me thirty bucks but it was worth it," he said.

★ ★ ★

WE enter the briefing tent to see where we are going to drop. The sand table, on which is reproduced the terrain that we are to occupy, gives you a remarkable realistic picture. The terrain is of green sand, the Rhine River and other water areas are marked with blue sand, the main highway is of red sand, and the secondary roads are in white. Tiny trees and houses dot the terrain. The parachute and glider landing zones are plainly marked in yellow.

The briefing officer tells us our objective, who will support us, and what we anticipate the enemy will do. He explains the preparatory artillery barrage and the air-going over that the Germans will get. It makes you feel better and when you leave, you feel you know where you are going, and, above all, which direction you are going to move when you hit the ground.

Other troops go into the briefing tent and you listen to their comments as they leave. One barrel-chested lad with his jump-jacket thrown open to reveal a hairy chest says, "It looks good to me." A sergeant with him isn't so confident. He says: "The drop zone will probably be lousy with krauts." Another kid says: "You mean just like Normandy where we were

THE AIRBORNE OPERATION

to outnumber them six to one. Oh, yeah!"

When there was nothing else to do, some of the men read; others wrote letters home, and the volley-ball court was always filled. And, of course, there were the movies. There was an out-of-this-world thing called "Rainbow Island" which had Dorothy Lamour and her sarong. One trooper fell out of his tree looking at Ann Sheridan in "Doughgirls," and there were cynics who said it wasn't Annie at all who was responsible but the guy's desire to goof off the mission. Anyway, all he got was a few scratches....

★ ★ ★

You crawl deeper in your sack, but you can't get away from the noise. Over the roar of engines somebody is shouting a bunch of names... Andrews... Burger... Edwards... Fairbanks... Jones, Jack Jones... and on down the roster. C Company is falling out to fit their chutes.

Tomorrow there will be an early breakfast—0400, the order said. Then we will climb into our parachutes as dawn breaks. We will trudge out to the planes and climb in, not saying much of anything about anything. The men will know where they are going and what they are going to do. Some have done it before; for others this is the first time. But they all know this will be the end for the krauts. They'll sweat a bit, as any paratrooper sweats before making a parachute jump. They will get the same old butterflies. But they'll all jump. And when they hit the ground they will get down to cases.

IN THE AIR

By Cpl. JACK LEVIN

WITH THE 435TH TROOP CARRIER GROUP—One of our gliders was carrying a howitzer team and I talked to them before getting into the C-47.

One boy from Cleveland, Ohio, said he was Pfc. Joe Kaprowski. "Just another Pole," he added.

As the men loaded their equipment and ammo some were silent and serious; others talked and joked all the time. There was a big, ruddy-faced fellow who laughed about Kaprowski's crack and said, "I'm just another guy from Philly." His name was Harry Gregory and I asked him when he expected to get back from over the Rhine.

"God only knows and He won't tell," said Gregory.

Originally slated to take off at 0749, a last-minute change made our official departure read 0819. Led by Col. Frank MacNeese, Group CO, our planes roared down the runway, tauting their tow-ropes and gradually picking up speed. The tail of our C-47 lurched from side to side, as our two gliders jerked toward the center of the runway. We used every inch of the runway before we lifted into the air. The pilot, 1st Lt. Charles D. Cox of Greenfield, Ind., told me why.

"I've got this cockpit lined with flak pads," he said. "It makes the ship nose-heavy, but I'd rather take my chances this way."

Our two gliders bucked and strained at their tows as the combination of cross-wind and prop-wash tossed them from side to side. In front of and behind us there were tow-planes and gliders farther than I could see. Occasionally the sun rays would pick up an aircraft and turn it into a dazzling reflection. It was picturesque until the first glider fell.

The glider broke loose from its tow-plane and immediately began circling for an emergency landing. Then, as it hovered about 200 feet above the ground, its wings buckled and it dived nose down into the ground. No one got out.

Now it was 1000 hours and up ahead of us the first parachutists to make an airborne attack on Germany were leaving their planes.

T/Sgt. Mike Maciocia of Providence, R.I., came over to me and said I ought to look at something interesting. Her name was Betty and Mike had a picture of her stuck up in the plane. The plane itself was named "Betty." And there was a bright, gay-colored scarf of Betty's hanging from one of the overhead spars.

"Betty and I are sweating this one out," said Mike. "We figure it might be the last one in Europe. And you hate to get it on the finale."

This mission that Mike was worrying about was to be the longest in Troop Carrier history—just short of 600 miles. We were getting close to our objective now and trying to identify all the planes that the Air Corps had put around us was like a class in aircraft identification. Snub-nosed P-47s bulled around us; P-38s lazed about underneath us and then zoomed upward; Spitfires went by on the hunt; and A-26 medium bombers on patrol arrogantly passed us as if we were standing still.

WE were nearing the Rhine now and could see the bomb-marked terrain on both sides of the river. Down below I could see two P-47s smoking on the ground after crash landings. Time was getting short and we flashed the 10-minute signal to the gliders. 1st Lt. George Dewell of Thomasville, Conn., came back to put on his chest-chute and flak-suit, and the rest of us did the same.

Mike took a look at Betty and patted the gas tank he was sitting on.

"I'm staying right on this gas tank," he said: "If they hit the gas tank, we've had it anyway. So I'm staying right here."

We passed over a parachute DZ where thousands of white patches broke the brown terrain and told us that the paratroopers were fighting down below.

Finally we were over our LZ, which was covered by a haze of artificial fog. Sgt. Collins grabbed the Aldis lamp and signaled hurriedly through the astradome for our gliders to cut loose. Our gliders seemed to drop right away from us. I tried to follow them down, but I lost sight of them in the confusion of aircraft, burning planes and flak.

Some gliders were aflame before they

landed. The faster speed of the low planes and the flash of the enemy tracers made the gliders look like they were easing slowly to the ground—too slowly. Then I saw two gliders burst into flame, and they went straight down.

We were down to 700 feet, and that was low enough to hear the rifles crack. But now our motors roared with new speed that came from the lightened load, and the pilot gunned her through a sky that was spotted with ugly black and white air bursts. I don't know what the others thought about; Mike about Betty, I suppose. I sweated, and wanted to live.

It wasn't until we passed over the Rhine on the way back that I relaxed. Then I remembered that, after all, what I had been through was the easiest part of it.

Somewhere back there on the ground were "just another Pole" and "just another guy from Philly." And with them were a lot of others. They were still being shot at when I went to the rear of the plane feeling sick at my stomach.

ON THE GROUND

By A YANK Staff Correspondent

WITH THE AIRBORNE IN GERMANY—The troopers were down and moving toward their objectives when the gliders came over the LZs two hours later. They came in ordered pairs, bouncing along in a 120-mile wind whipped up by the prop wash.

Then came the sudden slowing as the tow lines were dropped, followed by the sharp crack of machine-gun bullets whipping through the cloth wings.

That is when you hear the flak, instead of seeing it like harmless balls of smoke ballooning somewhere out in the distance. That's when you realize what a slow and ungainly thing the glider you thought so graceful really is. And that's when you begin to sweat out the ground that seemed so close and now seems so far away.

As always, not all the gliders found their landing zones. The entire area of the drop, about 20 miles square, was shrouded in smoke. There was artillery smoke falling in the area as well as the smoke of the burning buildings set afire by the fighting that had been going on since 1000 hours. Also there was the smoke of our own smoke shells tossed in by our artillery to mark the LZs for the pilots.

Naturally, too, there was confusion—not ordered confusion but the disorder that is inevitable when two divisions of men are dropped into enemy territory by parachute and glider.

The area of the drop was heavily wooded and interspersed with small farms, the fields of which formed the DZs and LZs. The paratroopers who preceded the gliders came down just about the way it was planned, most of them landing in their proper zones and forming quickly to move out to their objectives.

But many of the gliders landed in fields some distance from their LZs. Many were splintered into matchwood and hung limply from the trees.

The tail of one struck an obstruction in landing, and it bounced into the air, describing a circle. Then its nose hit something and it looped again. Its entire crew was killed.

The last aerial photographs of the area were made the afternoon before the jump. At that time the photos showed the fields chosen for the LZs as clear, but by the time the gliders came over there had been some changes made.

Two gliders loaded with medics came down in a field where three machine guns formed a triangle around a Jerry searchlight. As the gliders neared the ground the MGs opened up, raking both ships from two sides. The medics in their newly-painted helmets tumbled out. They were unarmed but were cut down in a cross fire from 20 yards away.

One of the medics was a young Harvard medical school graduate who had just completed his training at the Mayo Hospital in Rochester, Minn. He had studied for years learning how to save other men's lives. He lost his own going to the aid of one of the wounded.

Near one of the LZs a paratrooper captain landed. The area was a field which adjoined

a double-track railroad, intersected by a road at a grade crossing. Around the crossing were trees, with a clump of woods north of the railroad. The captain apparently saw the woods and jerked his shroud lines to slip past them. But he didn't see the trees around the grade crossing and caught in top of one of them, and there he hung in plain view of the woods beyond the tracks.

The woods were full of Jerries and the captain swung his body pendulum-fashion to break the chute loose. He had described one arc and was swinging downward toward the woods from the peak of another arc when the MG spat. The captain died there, hanging from the shroud lines, his parachute billowing in the breeze.

His body hung for several hours, until the woods were cleared, his carbine across his chest, his pistol at his side, his pockets bulging with grenades and ammo clips. His hands in new leather gloves gripped his thighs as he had gripped them to swing his legs and start the pendulum.

When a group of paratroopers on their way to clean out the woods passed, they saw the body and the bars on the shoulder that were simply indistinct strips of adhesive tape.

As they passed, the paratroopers saluted.

Wherever the troopers went they stopped to look for buddies they had not been able to locate. They would go from parachute to parachute, lifting the silk to glance at a face, then dropping it. If they recognized a friend across a field, they would dash through fire to get to him and clap his shoulder and cuss him out in relief.

It was a tough day for the chute scroungers, the attached personnel who might never again have the chance to get such a smooth piece of silk.

You never knew when you picked up a chute whether or not you'd find a body under it.

Almost all the opposition in the area came from Luftwaffe ack-ack. The crews had billets in the little farm houses dotting the LZ and each of the houses was a separate fortress which had to be reduced by 75-mm. pack artillery or cleaned out by hand.

The work of cleaning out these nests was going on when the Liberators came over, following the glider trains with additional supplies. The pilots of the Libs took no chances of making a mistake. They came in low, braving the flak and sweeping across their targets at 100 feet to put the stuff where it belonged.

As one plane came over there was a man in the doorway struggling with a heavy load. It broke loose and tumbled out and he tumbled out after it. You could see him reach for his chute ring and pull it, but the chute barely had time to trail out in a long, loose stream of white before he hit the ground and bounced along, end over end like the core of an apple tossed from a moving car, the limp chute jerking after him.

That night between artillery bursts and one flashing swoop of a strafing plane over the area there were moments, rare moments, for rest and relaxation. And wherever there was a trooper or an airborne infantryman who had managed to bring an unbroken bottle through the day, someone was sure to voice the division toast before tilting the bottle:

"May your dog tags never part."

"They Satisfy"

GERMANY—Near the triangle formed by two intersecting rail lines and a bisecting road, a Jerry Volksturm shot and killed a paratrooper, then looted his pockets. Among the loot was two packages of Chesterfield cigarettes.

The Jerry got into his civilian car and drove up the road, where he was subsequently shot and killed by two members of the 6th British Airborne Division. They searched his pockets and removed the two packages of cigarettes.

Next day, 1st Lt. Burt English of Orville, Calif., SHAEF censor who was on his first airborne mission, ran into the British and ran out of cigarettes.

They gave him the two packs of Chesterfields.

—YANK Staff Correspondent