

Paratroopers Experiences in France, 1944

Flight to Drop Zone

"We boarded C-47s in Italy at about 2:30 A.M. and had a nice pleasant ride, with no opposition at all. Most of us were asleep until almost time to jump. They woke us up and said that we would be over the field in 8 minutes. That was at about 5:00 A.M. We stood up and hooked up (to the static line). It seemed like years went by as those last minutes ticked off. I was number 13 man. The green light came on and guys began to disappear in front of me. Then there I was at the door."

–Corporal Harland "Bud" Curtis, 1st Infantry Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment
Reprinted from *Operation Dragoon, Autopsy of a Battle*.

Jumping from a C-47 Transport Plane

"I can remember when I stood in the door in southern France, I thought 'Wow, what am I doing here?' I noticed on my watch that it was 0432 on 15 August 1944 and I thought: 'well that's actually two minutes late.' I was the first one out the door. We were pretty low, it seemed to me like around 800 feet."

–Captain Robert Dalrymple, Commanding Officer, of 596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company
Reprinted from *Operation Dragoon, Autopsy of a Battle*.

"I went out the door (of the plane) like I was throwing a flying block with my right shoulder at somebody. I was heading down nose first when 'wham' she opened and jerked me back up right. I looked up to make sure my chute was open and then I looked around."

–Bud Curtis, 1st Infantry Battalion, 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment
Reprinted from *Operation Dragoon, Autopsy of a Battle*.

"We were jumping from an average of 500 feet and were down on the ground in about 7 seconds. We landed at 3:20 in the morning, and the Germans didn't even know that we were there. Our first person to get killed was named Eric Morley. His parachute never opened."

–James Chittenden, 1st Independent Platoon, 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade, British Special Forces
Reprinted from *Operation Dragoon, Autopsy of a Battle*.

Paratroopers Experiences in France, 1944 cont.

Descent and Landing

"When you are leading the stick [group of paratroopers] out, as soon as your chute opens, you turn yourself around 180 degrees so you can see your men coming out, to make sure everybody got out. Then you had to get back and get ready to land. Well about the time that we did that, we went into a little cloud bank.... I didn't know where the ground was so I had to get ready to land, and pretty soon, bang, I landed on a rock pile on the bank of the Argens River there at le Muy [France]."

–Captain Robert Dalrymple, Commanding Officer, of 596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company

Reprinted from *Operation Dragoon, Autopsy of a Battle*.

First Moments on the Ground

"I came down near Lestre at about 0122 hours, 6 June. Seventeen others in my plane jumped at the same time, but I never saw any of them again. I lay in the field until dawn with the intention of getting to the coast to join my unit. From dawn until about 0900 hours I walked toward the coast through the fields. A German passed me on a bicycle as I was walking down a little road. Later that morning I met with some men from the 377th AB Artillery. I joined up with them, and we all moved toward the coast together. Four of us traveled until almost nightfall when we could see the coast. The Germans were just ahead of us, so we lay on top of a ridge and spent the night there."

–Private Charles H. Frankenfeld, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment

Escape and Evasion Report Number 863

National Archives and Records Administration

"I landed safely in a field and cut off my chute at once...I got out my compass and we started to crawl away as we heard Germans talking nearby and knew that they had seen us land. We got into a hedge and hid. The Germans combed the field. Just as they were going to find us, I threw two hand grenades at them, and we started firing. Then we ran away and hid again in a hedge. It was pretty dark and Germans did not come after us till the next morning. Then they discovered us and began firing at us. We ran out of ammunition about noon."

–Private Joseph Deziel, 101st Airborne Division

Escape and Evasion Report Number 893, National Archives and Records Administration

"Immediately on landing, 12 to 15 French people came running, surrounded us, and Therien, who could speak French, asked which direction to go. They said anyway but North. We all ran to a wood, shook hands, split up in pairs, and set off in different directions.

Paratroopers Experiences in France, 1944 cont.

"We crossed a barbed wire fence, a highway, and then a railroad. Then we went under a bridge and continued west along a creek where we found a series of small squares of thick underbrush... we stayed in these woods till dark and then set out on a south-west course through a field. We crossed a railroad running due east-west. Coming to a small village we walked around it and stayed on this same course until about 10 p.m. We were tired out and wet and at this time we had on low shoes. We found an old abandoned farmhouse. I still had my torch [flashlight] which turned out to be very useful. We found a hay loft above a pig pen and slept there all night and till dark the next day. We had a good view from this hiding place and there was no activity around it. We then left for a large farmhouse we had been watching all day.

"We opened the door and walked in on some people who had just finished eating. There were five grown people and two children. They stared at us a few minutes and then started jabbering. One large man just looked at us and then came up and said that he was Swiss. He made a great fuss over me. I showed him the 'U.S.' on my clothes and the man showed them all around the room. He told the women to give wine to us. They offered us their bed, but we said that we would rather sleep in the barn."

–Second Lieutenant Jack E. Williams, 360th Bomb Squadron

Escape and Evasion Report Number 9, National Archives and Records Administration

On the Use of Escape and Evasion Aids

1. Of the aids box contents, I used the Horlicks tablets, a chocolate bar, matches, and chewing gum. I used the adhesive tape to hide one of the compasses in the event of capture. The food had a plastic box taste.
2. I carried a red purse. Used the maps of France and gave the money to French Helpers.
3. I had no extra evasion aids and did not carry escape photos.
4. I had been lectured (about escape and evasion kits) at Baier Field, Ft. Wayne, Indiana and at Burkston Health by Captain Newman. I didn't think that the lectures particularly valuable because evasion requires the use of common sense. The French should be trusted when necessary and a working knowledge of French is required.

–Second Lieutenant John N. Hendrey, 14th Troop Carrier Squadron, 61st Troop Carrier Group
Escape and Evasion Report Number 781, National Archives and Records Administration

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