



General Eisenhower visiting the paratroopers of the 502nd on 5 June 1944 at RAF Greenham Common before they took off for Normandy.

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ALLIED 21ST ARMY GROUP D-DAY, 6 JUNE 1944

THE GREATEST SEABORNE INVASION THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

by Ian R Gumm MSTJ TD VR BSc (Hons)

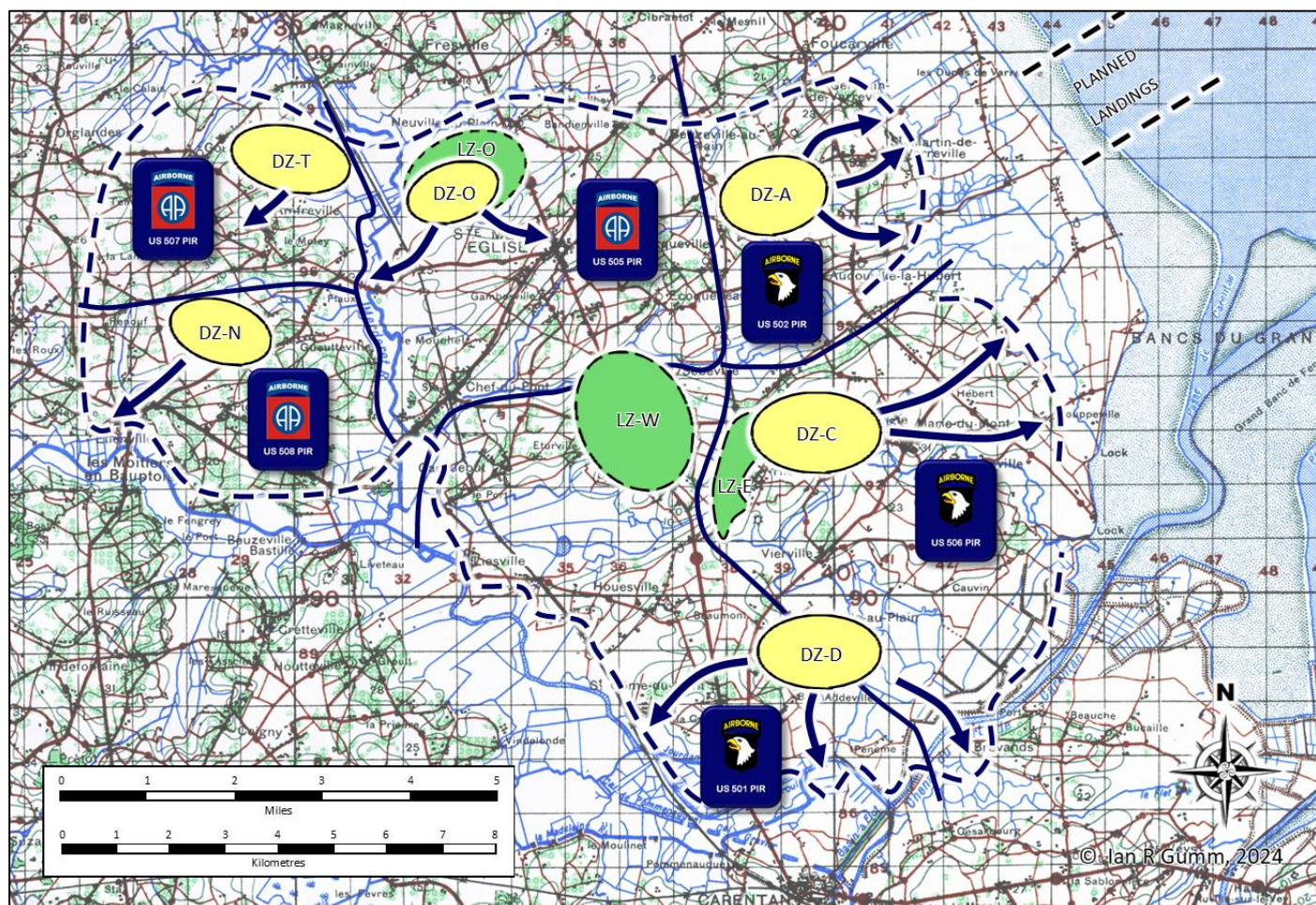
### PART TWELVE – THE 101<sup>ST</sup> AIRBORNE BEHIND UTAH BEACH

This article concentrates on the 101st 'Screaming Eagles' Airborne Division behind UTAH Beach on D-Day.

Major General Joseph Lawton Collins' US VII Corps was assigned the task of assaulting and securing UTAH Beach and establishing a lodgement area from which future operations to capture the deep-water seaport of Cherbourg could occur. To aid in this the US VII Corps had two US Airborne divisions attached: the 82nd 'All American' Airborne Division and the 101st 'Screaming Eagles' Airborne Division. Their collective role was to secure the area inland of UTAH Beach and the crossings over the River Merderet for the seaborne forces to come ashore, establish the beachhead, and cut across the Cotentin Peninsula to seal off the port of Cherbourg.



While the 82nd Airborne Division carried out its missions, the 101st Airborne Division was dropping behind UTAH Beach intent on blocking the approaches to the beach and preventing the Germans from interfering with the seaborne landings. Their mission was to capture the inland ends of four causeway exits off UTAH Beach, destroy two bridges northwest of Carentan, seize and hold the lock at La Barquette, and establish crossings over the River Douve to assist in the merger of the two American beachheads at UTAH and OMAHA.



The American Airborne Plan. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

The 101st was commanded by Major General Maxwell D Taylor and consisted of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Their night parachute assault was codenamed Mission ALBANY and consisted of 10 serials in three waves. 432 C-47 Skytrains of the US IX Troop Carrier Command carried the 6,928 paratroopers of the division to Normandy.

Colonel Howard R Johnson's 501st was tasked with securing the lock at La Barquette, blowing two bridges on the road northwest of Carentan and capturing the town of Saint Côme-du-Mont. Lieutenant Colonel Robert C Carroll's 1st Battalion [1/501] was responsible for securing the lock and crossings over the River Douve to the south of UTAH Beach, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Ballard's 2nd Battalion [2/501] was responsible for blowing the bridges to the northwest of Carentan and securing Saint Côme-du-Mont and Lieutenant Colonel Julian Ewell's 3rd Battalion [3/501] was detached to form the 101st's reserve.



Major General Maxwell D Taylor.



Colonel Howard R Johnson.



Colonel George Van Horn Moseley Jr.



Colonel Robert F Sink.

Colonel George Van Horn Moseley Jr's 502nd was tasked with securing the two northern beach exits, destroying the German Coastal Artillery Battery at Saint Martin-de-Varreville and linking up with the 82nd Airborne Division. Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Cassidy's 1st Battalion [1/502] was responsible for securing the area to the rear of UTAH Beach and tying in with the 82nd at Sainte-Mère-Église, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Chappuis' 2nd Battalion [2/502] was responsible for destroying the German Coastal Artillery Battery at Saint Martin-de-Varreville and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cole's 3rd Battalion [3/502] was responsible for securing the two northern beach exits.

Colonel Robert F Sink's 506th was tasked to secure the two southern beach exits and secure the line of the River Douve to the south of the UTAH area, including the two bridges near Le Port. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Strayer's 2nd Battalion [2/506] was tasked with securing the beach exits, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Wolverton's 3rd Battalion [3/506] was



responsible for seizing the two bridges at Le Port and Lieutenant Colonel William Turner's 1st Battalion [1/506] formed a Regimental reserve.

The main drops of the 101st started taking off from their respective airfields at 23:00 hrs.

Jumping on to DZ-A was Colonel George Moseley's 502nd. Headquarters 502nd left from RAF Aldermaston in the C-47 Skytrains of Major Glenn E W Mann, Jr's 71st Troop Carrier Squadron, 1/502 left from RAF Membury in the C-47s of Lieutenant Colonel Adriel N Williams' 436th Troop Carrier Group, and 2/502 and 3/502 left from RAF Greenham Common in the C-47s of Lieutenant Colonel John M Donalson's 438th Troop Carrier Group.

Also jumping on to DZ-A were those parachuting into Normandy from the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment [377 PFA]. They were conveyed in the C-47s of the 438th Troop Carrier Group and the C-47s of Captain Lester L Ferguson's 85th Troop Carrier Squadron.

Jumping on to DZ-C near Sainte-Marie-du-Mont were the 1/506 and 2/506 of Colonel Robert Sink's 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. They departed from RAF Upottery in the C-47s of Lieutenant Colonel Charles H Young's 439th Troop Carrier Group.

Also jumping on to DZ-C were Major General Maxwell Taylor's tactical headquarters and Lieutenant Colonel Julian Ewell's 3/501. They took off from RAF Welford Park in the C-47s of Lieutenant Colonel Frank J MacNees 435th Troop Carrier Group.

Jumping on to DZ-D near Angoville-au-Plain were 1/501 and 2/501 of Colonel Johnson's 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. They departed from RAF Merryfield in the C-47s of Lieutenant Colonel Theodore G Kershaw's 441st Troop Carrier Group.

Also Jumping on to DZ-D was Lieutenant Colonel Robert Wolverton's 3/506. They took off from RAF Exeter in the C-47s of Lieutenant Colonel Frank X Krebs' 440th Troop Carrier Group. Accompanying them was Company C of the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion [C/326 AEB].

Because of the problems experienced in the parachute drops in Sicily during Operation HUSKY the airborne commanders decided to employ Pathfinders to precede the main drops to mark the DZs with lights, beacons and electronic signals that the aircraft of the main drops could home in on.

The 101st Pathfinders were dropped in ten sticks, three from each Regiment and a composite team from the 326 AEB and the 377 PFA. They jumped into France between 00:15 and 00:45 hrs on 6 June 1944 and marked DZ-A, DZ-C and DZ-D with Eureka beacons and amber, green and red Holophane lights respectively. The pathfinders took off from RAF North Witham at 22:30 hrs.

Captain Frank Lillyman's pathfinders, from the 502nd, were the first to land shortly after 00:15 hrs. They missed their intended drop zone at DZ-A and came down a couple of miles to the northeast near Saint Germain-de-Varreville. With

insufficient time to get to the DZ before the main drops came in, they decided to set up their signals behind the church, however, they were unable to get either their amber Holophane lights or their Eureka beacon working before the main drops arrived.

The lead aircraft of the pathfinders of the 506th ditched in the English Channel on route to Normandy. The remainder continued onwards and dropped their pathfinders near DZ-C. However, most of their green Holophane lights were in the lead aircraft that ditched, and they were forced to use a handheld signal light that was not seen by many of the pilots. They did manage to set up the Eureka beacon just before the main assault force arrived, but this proved to be a poor guide at such short range.

The drop zone chosen for the 501st, DZ-D, was in an area identified by the Germans as a likely landing zone. Consequently, the enemy patrolled the area heavily and on the night of 5/6 June 1944 there were a higher-than-expected number of German soldiers in the area. This made it impossible for the pathfinders to set out their lights and they were forced to rely solely on the Eureka beacon. To compound this the aircraft bound for DZ-D missed their final turning point on the run-in and flew well past the drop zone before turning back to approach the DZ from the wrong direction. The parachute drops of Colonel Johnson's 501st were about ten minutes late and a mile or more off target.

The first two American combatants to die in the airborne landings were two of the 501st's pathfinders, PFC Stanley (Stan) Suwarsky and PFC Harold Eugene (Gene) Sellers. Both were killed around 04:00 hrs. Stan Suwarsky of the 3/501 team was killed on landing and Gene Sellers of the 2/501 team got caught up in a tree and was killed before he could cut himself free. It was probable that Stan Suwarsky was killed first, as he jumped a minute or so before Gene Sellers.

PFC Gene Sellers was typical of the men that made up the Pathfinder force.



PFC Harold Eugene Sellers.

*“PFC Harold E Sellers, born in 1922 in Jonesboro, Arkansas, was a promising athlete who excelled in football, basketball and baseball. As a feisty point guard for the Jonesboro*

*High School Hurricanes, Sellers led the team to a state championship. Sellers' niece, Anne Baily, recollected his wonderful laughter and happy-to-be-alive attitude which made everyone love the young man.*

*After Pearl Harbour, Sellers decided to give up a full football scholarship to the University of Arkansas to join the paratroopers. He could have joined the National Guard but chose the paratroopers instead to 'get into the action'. Sellers entered service on March 2, 1943 in Little Rock, Arkansas, and, after training at Fort Bragg, was sent to England to practice for the D-Day jump. In the late afternoon of June 5, Sellers' C-47 took off from North Witham Airfield, in Lincolnshire, England for France. His unit's mission was to set up signal beacons that pointed to the drop zones for the main body of the airborne assault forces. Reaching the area of Saint-Côme-du-Mont, Sellers and the rest of his team jumped into the darkness and were immediately hit by small arms tracer fire from the German troops on the ground. Sellers landed in a tree at a crossroads not far from the small French village, but far from his intended drop zone. He was unable to free himself from his parachute while hanging just a few feet from the ground. He was killed by fire of a German MG42 machine gun position set up near the road intersection. Killed a few minutes after midnight on June 6, Sellers was one of the first Americans killed on D-Day."*

None of the 101st's battalions managed to muster successfully. Those that did muster were under strength and often included men from other units of the Division and in some cases even men from the 82nd. Time was lost identifying their location relative to their objective and covering the ground between. The 2/502 came down on the wrong drop zone. Most of the remainder of the 502nd jumped in a disorganised pattern around the impromptu drop zone set up by the pathfinders near the beach. The 377 PFA experienced one of the worst drops of the operation, losing all but one of their howitzers and most of their men.

Despite the initial confusion Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Cassidy's 1/502 secured the northern area behind the beach exits but did not link up with the 82nd at Sainte-Mère-Église. The 2/502 was widely scattered and did not function properly as a unit on D-Day, though, Lieutenant Colonel Chappuis (despite being injured in the drop) did manage to occupy the German Coastal Artillery Battery position at Saint Martin-de-Varreville with some of his men. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cole's 3/502 managed to secure both northern beach exits and deal with the German soldiers that retreated across them without loss before establishing liaison with Lieutenant Colonel Conrad C Simmons's 1st Battalion of the 8th Infantry Regiment at 13:00 hrs.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Strayer's 2/506 was dropped well away from their designated DZ and assembled with difficulty. With only a portion of his Battalion available Lieutenant Colonel Strayer set off for exit number 2. They encountered several enemy groups along the way and became embroiled in a series of small skirmishes that held them up for most of the morning.

The fate of the C-47 Skytrain carrying the Company Commander of Company E 2/506 [E/506], First Lieutenant Thomas Meehan III, flown by Lieutenant Harold Cappelluto is illustrative of the dangers experienced by many of the pilots and aircrew during the D-Day drops.



The wreckage of the C-47 in which Lieutenant Thomas Meehan was flying near Beuzeville-au-Plain.  
This photograph was taken by Forrest Guth, a member of E/506, who did not know that it was  
Lieutenant Meehan's plane at the time.

As it flew over the fields of Normandy towards its intended DZ the C-47 was hit by flak. Lieutenant Frank Deflita, the pilot of the plane following Harold Cappelluto's C-47, later recalled:

*"As we flew over Normandy, DCA's started shooting at us, and Harold's plane got it several times. I could see Flak shrapnel going straight through his plane. After maintaining its course and speed for a while, the plane left the formation and slowly initiated a right turn. I followed it with my eyes and noticed its landing lights coming on, I thought it was going to be all right. Then, suddenly, it came crashing down into a hedgerow and instantly exploded."*

On arriving at Le Grand Chemin, Lieutenant Richard (Dick) Winters learnt that Lieutenant Thomas Meehan had been killed and, as the senior officer remaining of US E/506, he was now the Company Commander. He was called to the 2/506's command post and ordered by Lieutenant Colonel Strayer to neutralise a nearby German Artillery Battery that was firing upon the seaborne forces coming ashore. His orders were:

*"There are some Kraut 88's up ahead, up ahead and to the right about what, 200 yards, up through those gardens. Now they are right between us and Causeway number 2, firing onto the boys landing at UTAH. Do you think you can handle it?"*



First Lieutenant Richard (Dick) Winters.

Lieutenant Winters returned to his men and set about the task at hand. Lieutenant Winters gathered his small group together, which was just thirteen strong, and they set off moving along the hedgerow leading from Le Grand Chemin towards the sound of the guns. As they approached the Battery's position Lieutenant Winters carried out a quick reconnaissance and realised that he would have to divide the enemy into bite-sized chunks if he was to have any chance of destroying the guns.

Lieutenant Winters' plan was simple; he would get into the enemy's trench and work along it to seize and destroy each of the guns as he went. To achieve this, Lieutenant Dick Winters divided his men into five groups:

Group One — Lieutenant Dick Winters, Cpl Joe Toye, PFC Robert (Popeye) Wynn and PFC Gerald Lorraine.

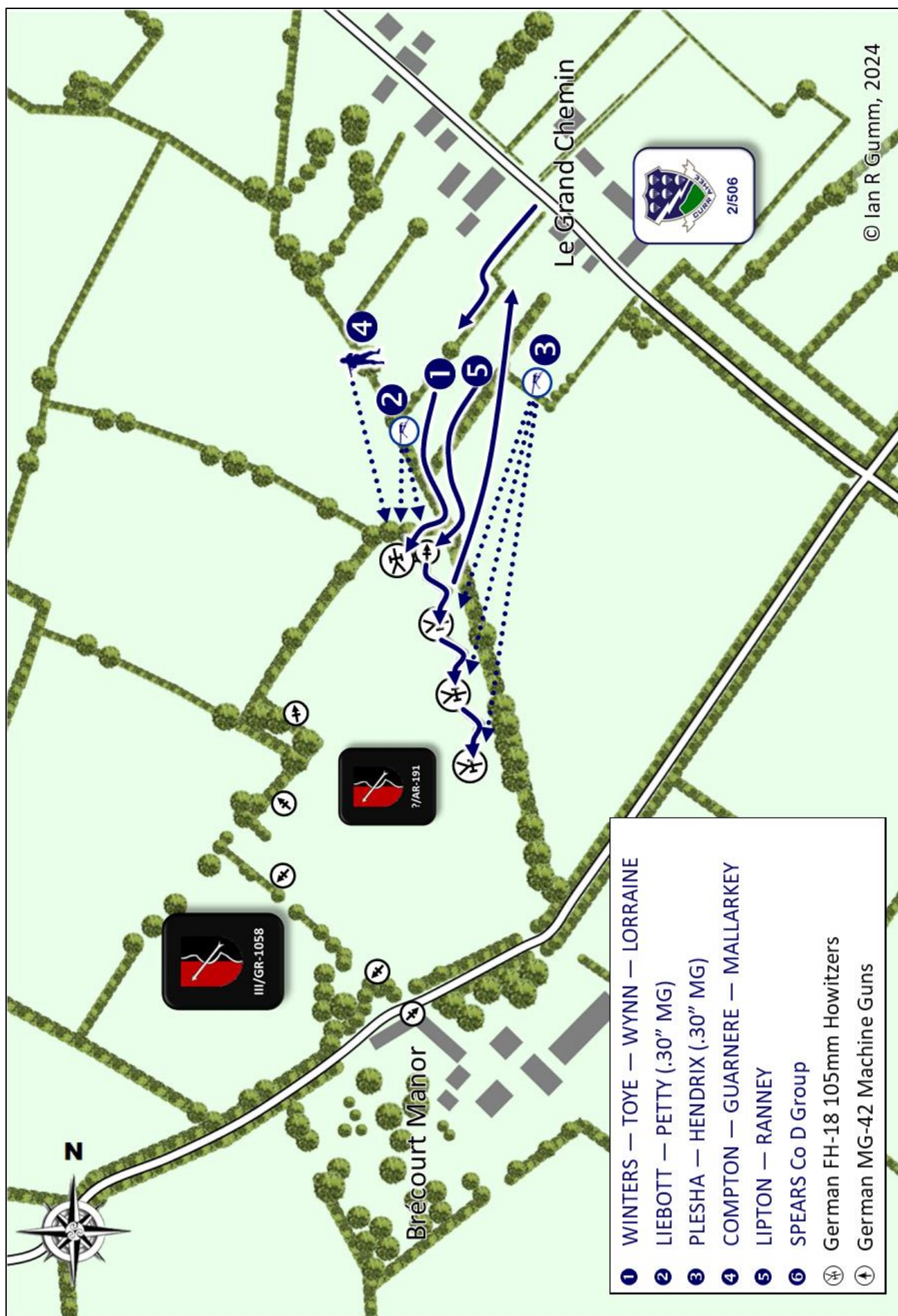
Group Two — One of the two Browning .30-inch machine guns manned by PFC Joe Liebgott and PFC Cleveland Petty.

Group Three — The other of the two Browning .30-inch machine guns manned by PFC John Plesha and PFC Walter Hendrix.

Group Four — Lieutenant Buck Compton, Sergeant Bill Guarnere and Sergeant Don Malarkey.

Group Five — Sergeant Carwood Lipton and Sergeant Mike Ranney.





The Brécourt Manor Assault by E/506 on 6 June 1944. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

He sent group four around to the left so they could assault the enemy's machine gun. Group five moved around to the right to a large tree from which they could lay down suppressive fire into the first German gun position. PFC Liebgott's and PFC Petty's machine gun, group 2, was placed in a position from which it could give covering fire to the initial assault. PFC Plesha's and PFC Hendrix's machine gun, group 3, was positioned to pour heavy continuous fire into the German positions from their front.

When Second Lieutenant Buck Compton's group had taken the enemy machine gun position, Lieutenant Winters led his group along the hedgerow to make a direct frontal assault into the first gun position as Second Lieutenant Compton led his group in from the enemy's right. Sergeant Carwood C Lipton recalled:

*"By about 8:00 am on the morning of D-Day, June 6, 1944, there were thirteen of us together from E Company of the 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment. We had joined together by two's and three's following our jump into Normandy shortly after 1:30 that morning. The rest of our company was scattered over the Normandy peninsula, and it would take several days for those who had survived the jump and the combat following it to join us.*

*We had two officers, Lieutenant Winters in command and Lieutenant Compton, two platoon Sergeants, Guarneri and I, and nine men, and we had two machine guns, a 60mm mortar, and our individual weapons. We had moved along the road network, led by Lieutenant Winters, from the vicinity of Sainte-Mère-Église, where many of us had landed, to a small village named Le Grand Chemin, near Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, joining up along the way with men from other companies in our Battalion and with some of our Battalion headquarters.*

*The entire group was stopped there by the sound of German artillery firing from a wooded hedgerow area off to the right of the road that we were on. Lieutenant Winters was called to Battalion and was ordered to take and destroy those guns with his company. None of us had been in combat before that day.*

*Lieutenant Winters had no time for a reconnaissance, but from his initial observation, he decided that there were several guns, manned and defended by probably at least 60 men, and that the guns were well dug in and camouflaged and that there was probably a network of trenches and foxholes around them. We learned later that he was right in all these estimates and that the German forces included a number of paratroopers from the German 6 Parachute Regiment. A frontal attack against those positions by 13 men could not succeed, but Lieutenant Winters confidently outlined to us his plan to deceive and defeat the German forces and to destroy the guns.*

*His plan was to concentrate a double envelopment attack on one gun, the one on the German left flank, and after capturing it to hit the other guns, one by one, on their open left flanks. He sent Lieutenant Compton and Guarneri around to our left to hit the*

*Germans on the first gun from their right front. He sent Sergeant Ranney and me around to our right to put fire into the German positions from their left flank. He set up the two machine guns in position to put heavy continuous fire into the German positions from their front. He then organized and led the rest of our men in a direct assault along the hedgerow right into the German positions.*

*With fire into their positions from both flanks, heavy machine gun fire into their front, and Lieutenant Winters leading an assault right into their defences the Germans apparently felt that they were being hit by a large force. Those defending the first gun broke and withdrew in disorganization to a far tree line, and that gun was in our hands.*

*Our attack then continued to each gun in turn from its exposed left flank. Lieutenant Winters blew out the breeches of each gun as soon as we had it with blocks of TNT. In all, the Germans lost 15 men killed, three of them by Lieutenant Winters, 12 captured, and many wounded. In E Company we had one man killed and one wounded.*

*These guns were sited to put artillery fire on the full expanse of UTAH Beach, where the US 4th Division was coming ashore from landing craft. They had forward observers along the beach to direct the fire. The capture and destruction of the guns was a major factor in the success of the UTAH landings and in the almost complete lack of casualties in that Division during its landing.*

*I was in many combat operations throughout the war in Europe, and, this was the most outstanding example of a combat leader reading a situation, forming a plan to overcome almost impossible odds, organizing and inspiring his men so that each one would confidently handle his part of the plan, and leading his men in the most dangerous parts of the operation.”*

Lieutenant Winters' men took care of the first three German guns and were joined by Lieutenant Ronald Spears and some men from Company D. They accounted for the fourth and final gun before the American paratroopers withdrew back along the trench and to Le Grand Chemin. In all 24 paratroopers took part in the assault; 13 were in Lieutenant Winter's group, PFC John D Hall of Company A, a radio operator Lieutenant Dick Winters had picked up when he had landed in Normandy, the 9 paratroopers in Lieutenant Spear's group, and Warrant Officer Junior Grade [WOJG] Andrew Hill who came upon the battle while making his way to the US 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment RV.

In his After-Action Report, Lieutenant Winters wrote:

*“Second Battalion while marching through above mentioned town 09:30 D-Day was fired on point blank by a battery of four 105's, from a range of 350 yards ... same battery was also firing on troops on the beach. Nine men and two Officers made the assault.*



*The enemy had dug positions in a hedgerow around the perimeter of a rectangular field – about 1,200 yards total in length. One corner of this position had a hedgerow that led into the entrenchment. Covering this hedgerow and the enemies flank were one 105, a machine gun and few riflemen. The other three 105's were firing out toward the beach and on the battalion they had pinned down.*

*The assault team decided on attacking the position down the one hedgerow that led to this entrenchment – all other approaches were across open fields. So under fire from the 105 protecting this flank and also small arm fire, the party worked their way into position and then opened up with all the fire power they could muster to pin the enemy down, while Sergeant Guarnere lead a group of three men to a position where he could hand grenade them.*

*The combined small arms fire and grenades drove the enemy out of the entrenchment protecting the flank, permitting the assault team to gain a fast hold. More grenades drove then gun crew of three from the first 105, who were killed before they had gone twenty-five yards. Sergeant Guarnere accounted for one of the three. The assault team was reorganized here again, and as in each case to follow, Sergeant Guarnere displayed extraordinary gallantry and disregard for his own safety in seeing that this job was done correctly. By his very attitude and manner and display of confidence, he inspired the whole assault team and displayed the type of leadership that wins battles. After reorganizing the team, knocked out a machine gun and crew by rifle fire that was firing at us through the entrenchment. Immediately the team rushed the second 105 and crew, leaving behind three men to protect the rear. In the second assault, Sergeant Guarnere was again lead man and by using the same tactics, the second position was taken and five Germans killed, with no losses to ourselves.*

*At this time six Jerries decided they had enough and advanced with hands over head calling to us "No make me dead". They were immediately returned to the battalion along with all the documents and maps we could find – one map was of great value for it showed all 105 emplacements and entrenchments of the defensive set-up of the peninsula.*

*With all four guns taken and destroyed, we withdrew out of the position, and continued to harass the enemy with machine gun and 60mm mortar fire – which had just arrived – until two tanks arrived. Then we made an assault with the tanks and cleaned out the position. In all we suffered six wounded and four killed, the enemy had 15 killed – Sergeant Guarnere personally accounted for five – and captured twelve. Enemy forces estimated at about forty-five.*

*Mission completed, we rejoin our battalion, which had departed after the four 105's were destroyed, for their objective."*

Colonel Robert Sink recommended that Lieutenant Richard Winters be awarded the Medal of Honor, but the award was downgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross due to the policy of only one Medal of Honor being awarded per division. His citation reads:

*“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Richard D Winters (ASN: 0-1286582), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. First Lieutenant Winters with seven enlisted men, advanced through intense enemy automatic weapons fire, putting out of action two guns of the battery of four 88-mm. that were shelling the beachhead. Unswerving in his determination to complete his self-appointed and extremely hazardous task, First Lieutenant Winters and his group withdrew for reinforcements. He returned with tank support and the remaining two guns were put out of action, resulting in decreased opposition to our forces landing on the beachhead. First Lieutenant Winters' heroic and determined leadership exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 101st Airborne Division, and the United States Army.”*

The artillery pieces were not 88mm guns as mentioned in Lieutenant Winters' citation but 105s.



One of the 105mm guns at the Brécourt Battery.

Lieutenant Lynn (Buck) Compton, Sergeant Bill Guarnere, and PFC Gerald Lorraine were each awarded the Silver Star. Sergeant Carwood Lipton, Sergeant Don Malarkey, Sergeant Mike Ranney, Corporal Joe Toye, PFC Walter Hendrix, PFC

Joe Liebgott, PFC Cleveland Petty, PFC John Plesha, and PFC Robert (Popeye) Wynn were each awarded the Bronze Star.

The one man was killed during the assault, PFC John D Hall of Company A, the radio operator Lieutenant Dick Winters had picked up when he had landed in Normandy. PFC Popeye Wynn was the only other casualty within Lieutenant Winters' group when he was wounded in his buttock. Lieutenant Ronald Spears lost Sergeant "Rusty" Houck from Company F and another paratrooper from Company D, and PFC Leonard G Hicks from D Company was wounded.

Another to be killed at Brécourt Manor was WOJG Andrew Hill. During the heat of the battle, he crawled up to Sergeant Carwood Lipton inquiring where the 506th Regimental Command Post was located. Sergeant Lipton yelled to him *"It's back that way"* and pointed in the appropriate direction. When WOJR Hill raised his head, he was struck by a bullet in the forehead killing him instantly.

The action of Lieutenant Richard Winters and his men has subsequently been recounted by Stephen E Ambrose in his book *"Band of Brothers"* and immortalised in the HBO TV series co-produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks.

Colonel Sink did not receive any word about their situation or progress from 2/506 and he decided to send the 50 men who had assembled from Lieutenant Colonel Turner's 1/506 to secure Exit 1. He would have liked to have done the same at Exit 2, but he did not have the manpower available. Major General Maxwell Taylor was also concerned about the two southern beach exits and sent the men mustered from Lieutenant Colonel Julian Ewell's 3/501, the Divisional reserve, to secure Exit 1.

Lieutenant Colonel Julian Ewell's 3/501 reached the village of Pouppeville, which they proceeded to take house by house from Leutnant Rohweder's 2/919. Their small number meant this took some time, but they finally secured the village and the inland end of Exit 1. It was there, at Pouppeville, that the first link-up between the seaborne and airborne forces took place when Lieutenant Colonel Carlton O MacNeely's 2nd Battalion US 8th Infantry Regiment came up Exit 1 from UTAH Beach.

The leading elements of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Strayer's 2/506 did not reach the inland end of Exit 2 until 13:30 hrs. By 14:30 hrs they had secured the inland end of this exit, and it was around 18:00 hrs that the men from Lieutenant Colonel Erasmus H. Strickland's 3rd Battalion 8th Infantry Regiment crossed the causeway from UTAH Beach. When Lieutenant Colonel Strayer's men finally reached Pouppeville, the 3/501 had already occupied the village and the 4th Infantry Division was already crossing the causeway.

To the south of the UTAH Beach, area along the River Douve estuary, Lieutenant Colonel Wolverton's 3/506 was less successful. The Germans had anticipated a parachute landing in the area and were prepared for the drop. As the 3/506 came down onto their DZ the Germans set fire to an oil-soaked building that lit up the whole area. Consequently, many of the American paratroopers who landed on the DZ were killed as they came down or before they could get off it. Included among those killed were Lieutenant Colonel Robert Wolverton and the battalion's executive officer Major George Grant.



The only part of the Battalion that played any part in D-Day was that which missed the DZ. This was a small force under Captain Charles Shettle, the Battalion S-3, and they managed to seize the two bridges at Le Port. Captain Shettle's force became embroiled in a series of small engagements with the defending Germans and was eventually forced to withdraw from the eastern end of the two bridges as their ammunition supply dwindled. They continued to hold on to the western end of the bridges until they were relieved two days later.

Colonel Johnson, who also landed on the DZ, managed to extract himself and collected a mixed group from the battalions of the 501st. These, he led to the lock at La Barquette. With this mixed force, Colonel Johnson assaulted and secured the lock. He then attempted to coordinate the actions of his regiment in carrying out their other tasks. Unable to do this, Colonel Johnson tried to move his small force from La Barquette to destroy the road bridges but found it impossible to move along the river. He then tried to outflank the enemy by moving away from the river, but this too proved unsuccessful, and in the end, he returned to the lock and consolidated the position.

Most of the paratroopers of the 501st landed well away from their designated DZs and the actions of the night of 5/6 June 1944 bore little resemblance to those that had been so carefully planned. Stiff resistance from the defending Germans met those members of the 501st that landed on the DZ, and a number were killed including Lieutenant Colonel Robert Carroll, the commander of the 1/501. The Battalion's executive officer Major Philip Gage was wounded and taken prisoner and all the 1/501 Company Commanders and staff officers were initially missing.

Lieutenant Colonel Ballard gathered a portion of 2/501 on landing before moving towards Saint-Côme-du-Mont. At Les Droueries they encountered a German force that Lieutenant Colonel Ballard considered too large to leave in his rear. Whilst engaging this enemy force he received orders from Colonel Johnson to move his men to La Barquette.

When the 2/501 had dealt with the enemy and taken Les Droueries, Lieutenant Colonel Ballard withdrew his men and set off towards the lock. However, unable to find a way across the marshy area between the two positions, the 2/501 ended up having to fight, once again, for the ground they had taken that morning.

The village of Angoville-au-Plain was just 400 meters east of DZ D and was occupied by the 326 AEB shortly after their landing. Two medics of the 101st, PFC Robert Wright and PFC Kenneth Moore set up an aid station inside the 11th Century church. They then scoured the open countryside searching for the injured and took them back to the church for treatment. Not too long after they had taken the village the American paratroopers were forced to withdraw. The two medics chose to stay with the wounded they were treating. Kenneth Moore recalled:

*"By the evening we had 75 of them (wounded personnel and one local infant, in the church). Our own folk had come to tell us that they could not stay any longer. So, we were left with the wounded. A German Officer soon arrived and asked if I could tend to his wounded too. We accepted. During the night the churchyard was the scene of another battle.*

*Two of our casualties died. But among those I could tend, none lost their lives. I tended*

*all sorts of wounds; some were skin deep but others were more serious abdominal cases.”*

The battle for Angoville-au-Plain raged around the church for three days, with possession lurching back and forth between the two sides. At one stage German troops forced their way in, but seeing the medics were impartially treating injured from both sides, withdrew and placed the international symbol of medical aid on the church door, the red cross flag. A mortar hit the building causing further injuries, but the medics struggled on. To their shock on 7 June, two Germans surrendered to them, after hiding all that time in the church tower.

By 8 June the battle was finally over and Angoville-au-Plain became the established headquarters of Colonel Robert Sink's US 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment. With the situation stabilised the two medics got a well-earned sleep, their first since landing in Normandy. For their actions at Angoville-au-Plain PFC Robert E Wright and PFC Kenneth J Moore were awarded the Silver Star.



PFC Robert E Wright.



PFC Kenneth J Moore.

In 24 hours, just 2,500 of the 6,000 paratroopers of the 101st had assembled, and many more fought with the 82nd or in small groups behind enemy lines for days. Despite this, Major General Maxwell Taylor's 101st Airborne Division achieved considerable success on D-Day by preventing the Germans from interfering with the seaborne landings of Major General Lawton Collins' US VII Corps.

## Look Forward

In Part Thirteen of D-Day, 6 June 1944 – The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I return to the 82nd to look at the battle that developed at the La Fièvre causeway in the days after D-Day.

If you are interested in a tour following in the footsteps of The Allied 21st Army Group on D-Day, please visit <https://www.inthefootsteps.com/d-day-tour.html>.

If you are interested in a tour following in the footsteps of an individual, or indeed any specific Allied formation or unit, that took part in the Battle of Normandy that followed, please contact us via our Tailor-made Tours page, <https://www.inthefootsteps.com/tailor-made-tour-service.html>, telling us where you want to go, when, for how long, and the standard of hotel you would like and we will put together a proposal for your consideration.

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