



A photograph looking eastwards along the La Fièvre causeway after it was captured.

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

THE GREATEST SEABORNE INVASION THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

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## PART THIRTEEN – THE FIGHT FOR THE LA FIÈRE CAUSEWAY D+1 TO D+3

In Part Ten, I looked at the fighting at La Fièvre on D-Day, in this article I look at how that continued on D+1 to its capture on D+3.

By nightfall on D-Day 6 June 1944, the American paratroopers at La Fièvre Bridge held the eastern bank whilst the Grenadier-Regiment 1057 held the west. Across the river on the western side, near Amfreville, Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' men had set up their defensive position in the orchard, and around 1,000 metres to their west Colonel Millett's group had also established a defensive position at Les Landes. At Chef-du-Pont Captain Roy Creek's men had established a defensive position at the bridge at the eastern end of the causeway and to the west of the River Merderet Lieutenant

Colonel Shanley's group had established a defensive position at Hill 30. All three groups west of the River Merderet were isolated and unable to establish physical liaison with each other or the remainder of the 82nd Airborne Division. The situation along the River Merderet was far from good and the American paratroopers urgently needed reinforcements. Those reinforcements would also arrive by air, not by parachute but by glider.

## The D-Day Glider Landings

While the paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were striving to carry out their tasks on the ground behind UTAH Beach in the early hours of D-Day 6 June 1944, the first reinforcements, which consisted mainly of artillery, were beginning to land by glider. Because of a shortage of tug aircraft, not all could be transported to France in one wave and the initial wave consisted of the anti-tank guns and support troops for each division. These came in two hours after the paratrooper drops in the pre-dawn of 6 June 1944 and were codenamed Mission CHICAGO and Mission DETROIT.

Mission CHICAGO was the landing of the 101st's elements on the Hiesville Landing Zone (LZ E) behind UTAH Beach. It formed Serial 27 of the overall air plans and the tug aircraft were provided by the troop-carrying C-47 Skytrains of Colonel William B Whitacre's 434th Troop Carrier Group based at RAF Aldermaston. It consisted of 52 aircraft and their accompanying CG-4A Waco gliders carrying elements of the 101st Divisional Headquarters, part of the 101st Signal Company, the anti-tank platoon of the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment, elements from the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion including a bulldozer, Batteries A and B of the 81st Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion and a surgical team from the 326th Airborne Medical Company. There were 155 airborne troops, sixteen 57mm anti-tank guns, 25 vehicles including a small bulldozer, 2.5 tons of ammunition and 11 tons of other equipment.

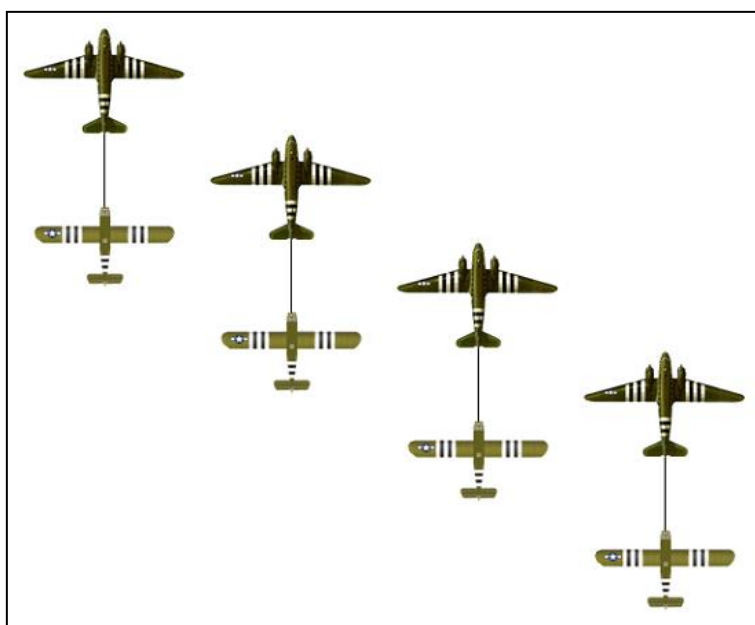


C-47 Skytrain troop-carrying aircraft towing CG-4 Waco gliders on their way to Normandy as part of the invasion.

The glider landings were originally planned for twilight on 5 June 1944, but this was changed to 04:00 on D-Day to protect the gliderborne troops from ground fire. The Hiesville LZ was chosen as it was central to the 101st's area of operations and slightly overlapped DZ C. A BUPS (Beacon, Ultra-Portable S-band) Beacon guided the tug aircraft onto the LZ using the SCR-717 search radars installed in the C-47 of flight leaders.

The LZ was triangular and about 1,500 metres wide by 2,500 metres long. Its base was along the road connecting Les Forges and Sainte-Marie-du-Mont and its eastern edge ran through Hiesville. This small hamlet was the location of the 101st's Divisional Command Post and was around three kilometres west of Sainte-Marie-du-Mont. In addition to its central location, the fields within the LZ were on average twice the length of most others in the vicinity. Many of the fields, however, were bordered by poplar trees up to 10 metres in height, some of which surmounted earthen banks; a fact that did not show up well on aerial reconnaissance photographs.

The first of the 52 aircraft and Waco gliders took off from RAF Aldermaston at 01:19 in bright moonlight that enabled the tugs and their gliders to assemble in thirteen flights each of which was in an echelon of four to the right formation.



Echelon of four to the right formation. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

Shortly after take-off, the glider carrying the radio and headquarters signallers of the 101st Airborne Division separated from its tug aircraft and landed. This meant that the 101st's main radio link with the other invasion forces did not arrive until after link-up with the 4th Infantry Division coming off UTAH Beach.

The weather was not good, and visibility was patchy along the route with low-lying clouds and patchy ground fog. However, because the tugs and gliders flew in an echelon of four to the right formation they flew through the low cloud without breaking formation. After crossing the coast of France, they received some ground fire that resulted in one of the C-47 and its glider going down near Pont l'Abbé west of the LZ, while seven other C-47s and several gliders sustained a degree of damage. Only one of the tug aircraft strayed from the formation and it released its glider about thirteen kilometres from the LZ south of Carentan.



The BUPS for LZ E had been damaged on landing so the leading aircraft had to rely on the Eureka beacons for guidance onto the LZ and, although the LZ T-marker had been placed in the wrong place, its green Holophane lights were seen by the pilots as they approached. The 49 remaining tug aircraft and gliders reached their designated landing area six minutes early and began releasing the gliders at 03:54. They split into two columns as prescribed to avoid congestion on the landing zone. They released their gliders from an altitude of 140 metres. Their gliders released, the tug aircraft headed over the English Channel and returned to RAF Aldermaston, landing shortly after 05:30.

Once released the gliders began their descent and approach to the landing zone. They swept into their prescribed 270-degree left turn and, in the process, most lost sight of the green Holophane light T. With the moon obscured by the low cloud and no sign of the T-marker they could not properly identify the LZ. Only 6 landed on the LZ and just 15 landed within half a kilometre. Ten gliders landed close together near Les Forges to the west of LZ E, and the other eighteen were scattered to the south and southeast. All but one, however, landed within three kilometres of the LZ.

Accompanying the gliders of Mission CHICAGO was a glider carrying the 101st's 51-year-old Assistant Divisional Commander, Brigadier-General Don Forrester Pratt, who had originally been assigned to command the Division's Divisional train and reserve troops to be landed by sea. He was in the 'Fighting Falcon', the first glider to land. It was fitted with a bolt-on Griswold nose protection device and piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Mike Murphy, the senior glider pilot of IX Troop Carrier Command, and Second Lieutenant John M Butler. Brigadier-General Pratt was strapped into the seat of his jeep and his aide, Lieutenant Lee J May, sat in the jump seat behind the jeep. The Jeep was not chained but was tied down with nylon rope.



Left to right: Lieutenant Lee J May, Brigadier-General Don F Pratt, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Murphy and Second Lieutenant John M Butler pose in front of 'The Fighting Falcon'.

The Fighting Falcon landed on the LZ successfully, but when Lieutenant Colonel Murphy applied the brake the wet surface of the LZ caused the glider to skid and did not slow it down sufficiently. The glider overran the LZ and crashed

into a line of 10-metre-tall poplar trees atop an earth and stone bank, a typical Normandy hedgerow. Lieutenant Colonel Murphy suffered severe injuries, breaking both of his legs. The limb of one of the trees came through the co-pilot's side of the cockpit and killed Lieutenant Butler. Brigadier-General Pratt was flung forward in the jeep as it flexed on the nylon rope but did not break loose. The impact of hitting the tree line broke his neck due to the whiplash making him the first Allied officer of General rank to be killed in the Liberation of Northwest Europe. Lieutenant May sitting in the jump seat behind the Jeep survived the crash unscathed. Brigadier-General Don F Pratt was buried in a Normandy field, wrapped in a parachute, until the end of the war when he was exhumed and reinterred on 26 July 1948 at Arlington National Cemetery in Section 11.

Most of the other gliders also crash-landed with many coming to a halt in the smaller fields outside the LZ after overshooting to clear unexpected trees. The small-arms fire of the German forces in the vicinity was largely ineffective in the dark, and even though several of the gliders struck a tree, the earthen banks surrounding some of the fields or ended up in a ditch, most were unloaded successfully. The total casualties were 5 dead, 17 injured, and 7 missing.



CG-4 Waco gliders land in Normandy.

Mission DETROIT was the landing of the 82nd Airborne Division's elements on LZ O and was serial 28 of the overall air plans. The C-47 Skytrain tug aircraft were provided by Colonel Cedric E Hudgens' 437th Troop Carrier Group based at

RAF Ramsbury. It consisted of 52 aircraft and their accompanying CG-4A Waco gliders carrying elements of the 82nd's Divisional Headquarters, part of the 82nd Signals Company, a portion of the 82nd Divisional Artillery and Battery A and Battery B of the 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion. There were 220 airborne soldiers, 22 jeeps, five trailers, sixteen 57mm anti-tank guns and ten tons of equipment and other supplies.

The 52 aircraft of 437th Troop Carrier Group with their CG-4A Waco gliders began taking off from RAF Ramsbury at 01:59 and by 02:23 had all its planes in the air bar one which lost its glider and returned for a substitute. As they approached the coast of France, the aircraft ran into low-lying clouds that extended between 250 and 425 metres. The leading aircraft, and many of those following, climbed to around 450 metres to get above the clouds before dropping through breaks in the cloud two or three minutes later. These aircraft became somewhat scattered and were slightly to the north of their intended route. The tug aircraft and gliders that flew on through the cloud found themselves in visibility so bad that many glider pilots could not see the tug aircraft towing them. Although most of their pilots remained on course, the formations broke up.

While in the cloud, several gliders broke loose or were released; two were found in the western part of Normandy, but others were still missing a month later. The visibility was still bad enough as they approached their intended landing zone that seven gliders were released prematurely to the west of the River Merderet. Once through the clouds, German small-arms and machine gun fire was heavy enough to bring one of the tug aircraft down and thirteen more were sufficiently damaged to be temporarily grounded for repairs on their return to England. Several of the gliders also sustained some damage from the German ground fire and several of the airborne soldiers they were carrying were killed or wounded.

37 of the original 52 tug aircraft and gliders reached the LZ between 04:01 and 04:10. The Eureka beacons were working but the T-marker was not. Although, their formation was by this time very loose, many of the aircraft formed into the prescribed two columns with the left-hand column slightly to the north of the LZ and the right-hand one approximately over the centre. The tug aircraft released their gliders between 120 and 150 metres before descending to 30 metres, heading for the Channel and back to England. Most of the stragglers released their gliders in the same general area before they too, turned for home. The first returning aircraft reached RAF Ramsbury at 05:22 and the last straggler landed at 06:10.

Whilst the descent of the gliders at LZ O was not a complete shamble, it did not go according to plan. Instead of coming down in a smooth and coordinated stream, they came down by ones and twos. Several came in under enemy ground fire and one glider pilot later claimed that his glider had been attacked by an enemy fighter. The main problem the glider pilots had was orientating themselves and identifying their intended fields, with the railway and Sainte-Mère-Église being the only recognisable landmarks in the dim light. 23 of the gliders landed on LZ O and nine others, including two that crash-landed in Sainte-Mère-Église, landed within three kilometres of the LZ. Three came down at the Hiesville LZ, having followed the navigation aids set out for Mission CHICAGO.

22 gliders were all but destroyed on their landing and about a dozen others were badly damaged. The main cause being the small fields and Normandy hedgerows that surrounded them. Some came down in the flooded area of the Marais and others were smashed up when they ran into 'Rommel's asparagus'; one even ploughed into a herd of cows. The numbers of casualties were, however, lighter than may have been expected with three killed and 23 injured. Several of the jeeps broke loose and eleven were unusable. Eight of the 57mm anti-tank guns landed on the LZ and all of these survived the landing. The arrival of the guns was particularly welcome, and a side-effect of the poor parachute drops was that several paratroopers were in the vicinity to aid with the unloading.



A Waco glider on the ground in a field planted with Rommel's asparagus to the northwest of Sainte-Mère-Église.

Though little more than 50% effective, Mission CHICAGO and Mission DETROIT did deliver the badly needed additional firepower to the lightly armed paratroopers.

Late on D-Day two more glider missions were flown, these were designed to bring reinforcements to the hard-pressed Airborne Divisions and were codenamed Mission KEOKUK and Mission ELMIRA.

Mission KEOKUK carried reinforcements for the 101st Airborne Division. It formed serial 29 of the air plans and was flown by 32 C-47 Skytrains of the 434th Troop Carrier Group from RAF Aldermaston towing 32 Horsa gliders bound for LZ E. The Horsa was bigger than the Waco and this lift consisted of 157 Signals, Medical and Headquarters personnel with 40 vehicles, 6 guns and 19 tons of other equipment and supplies. The first of the tug aircraft took off at 18:30 and the Horsa gliders were released over LZ E at 20:53, seven minutes ahead of schedule. The C-47s circled away from the LZ after releasing their gliders to fly out over the îles Saint-Marcouf and into the English Channel to reach RAF Aldermaston at 22:28.

When the Horsa gliders were released, they came under fire from the Germans three kilometres north of the LZ near Turqueville and three kilometres south of the LZ at Saint-Côme-du-Mont. These held their fire as the planes flew over but opened fire on the gliders as they descended. They were not, however, close enough to the LZ to have any significant effect and most of the Horsa gliders landed with no more than moderate damage. During the landing, fourteen of the airborne soldiers were killed and 30 more were wounded.

Mission ELMIRA was a larger mission than KEOKUK and carried reinforcements for the 82nd Airborne Division. It formed serials 30 to 33 of the air plans and all serials were to land on LZ W. This was an oval of about 2,500 metres long by 1,800 metres wide that had the main highway between Carentan and Sainte-Mère-Église running south to north through it. The northern end of the oval was about 1,000 metres south of Sainte-Mère-Église and about 1,000 metres from the southern end was the village of Les Forges. It was intersected at Les Forges by the road running east to west from Sainte-Marie-du-Mont to Chef-du-Pont.

Serial 30 carried the Headquarters and Battery C of the 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion, a part of the 82nd Airborne Divisional Artillery and part of the 82nd Airborne Signal Company. They were conveyed in eight CG-4A Waco gliders and 18 Horsa gliders towed by C-47s from the 437th Troop Carrier Group based at RAF Ramsbury that took off between 19:07 and 19:21.

Serial 31 carried the main Divisional Headquarters, part of the 82nd Airborne Signals Company, part of the 307th Airborne Medical Company and the 82nd Airborne Reconnaissance Platoon. They were conveyed in 14 CG-4A Waco gliders and 36 Horsa gliders towed by the C-47s of the 438th Troop Carrier Group based at RAF Greenham Common that took off between 18:48 and 19:16.

Serial 32 carried the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, a few of the artillerymen of the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, part of the 307th Airborne Medical Company, Company A of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion and part of the 82nd Airborne Divisional Artillery. They were conveyed in two CG-4A Waco gliders and 48 Horsa gliders towed by the C-47s of the 436th Troop Carrier Group based at RAF Membury.

Serial 33 carried the guns and bulk of the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion and they were conveyed in 12 CG-4A Waco gliders and 38 Horsa gliders towed by the C-47s of the 435th Troop Carrier Group based at RAF Welford.

This mission was split into two echelons to reduce congestion during the landings. The first echelon consisted of 76 gliders and was scheduled to land ten minutes after Mission KEOKUK. The second echelon of 100 gliders was due to land two hours later.

The first echelon consisted of serials 30 and 31. The Waco gliders were separated from the Horsa gliders to reduce the problems caused by flying two different types of gliders in one formation. There were 437 airborne soldiers, 64 small vehicles, thirteen 57mm anti-tank guns and 24.5 tons of equipment and other supplies.



Taking off with the heavy Horsa gliders was a slow business, but all the gliders assembled and set off in formation. The squally weather over England made the gliders hard to handle and they veered, pitched and rolled on their long towropes. As they crossed the coast of England at Portland Bill, they were joined by their fighter escorts, an impressive array of P-38s, P-47s and P-51s. They crossed the French coast flying over UTAH Beach unchallenged and it was not until they were approaching the landing zone that they started to receive enemy ground fire. In the main, this was small-arms and machine gun fire but also some fire from 20mm flak cannons. While the volume of fire was moderate it was unusually accurate as the enemy was close to the line of fight. Mission ELMIRA had neither darkness nor surprise to aid in its protection and two of the C-47s were shot down shortly after releasing the gliders. 37 of the C-47s sustained light to moderate damage and two had one of their engines shot up and put out of action.

For some unknown reason, the Eureka beacon, T-marker and smoke indicators for the LZ were not on the LZ but three kilometres northwest of it. To add to the confusion the indicators for LZ E were still visible from Mission KEOKUK, just three kilometres east of Les Forges. The leading C-47 of the 437th Troop Carrier Group headed straight for LZ W and released its glider at 21:04 followed by almost all of Serial 30. Ten minutes later the 438th Troop Carrier Group approached the LZ with Serial 31. They released their gliders at a height of between 150 and 230 metres, and several were released over LZ E. A Waco could glide for over three kilometres when released at that height, but a Horsa would glide about a kilometre and a half. After releasing their gliders, the C-47s turned to their left exposing themselves to fire from the area of Saint-Côme-du-Mont before heading back over UTAH Beach and the English Channel.

The situation at LZ W was not good when Mission ELMIRA came in. The main wedge of German resistance was, at that time, between Turqueville and Carquebut and stretched across the northern end of the LZ W separating the territory gained by the 82nd from that taken by the 101st and 4th Infantry Division. Major General Ridgway had at one stage thought the whole of LZ W to be in the hands of the enemy and had tried to get word to the XI Troop Carrier Command first by radio and then by laying out panels for reconnaissance planes, but, unfortunately, the message did not get through. During the afternoon, before the glider landings, the 8th Infantry Regiment had driven the enemy from the southern portion of LZ W, but the enemy still held the northern section. Thus, part of LZ W was still contested when Mission ELMIRA came in.

The glider pilots did their best but only two gliders from Serial 30 came to rest on LZ W. Twelve landed within a kilometre and a half of the LZ and all but one landed within three kilometres. In Serial 31 all but one of the 14 Waco gliders landed on or very close to the LZ. Nine of the Horsa gliders hit the zone and six came down within a kilometre and a half. Twelve of the Horsa gliders landed on LZ E and four missed the LZ by about five kilometres.

Over half of the Waco gliders landed intact while only 20% of the Horsa gliders landed without damage. Three Waco gliders and 21 Horsa gliders were virtually destroyed, though much of this was caused by enemy action. In the area north of Les Forges the survival of the men in the gliders depended upon the speed with which they could exit the glider and find cover before the enemy could bring their machine guns, mortars and artillery to bear. Of the glider pilots five were killed, four were missing and a further seventeen were wounded or injured; of their passengers, five were killed and eighteen were wounded or injured – remarkably few all things considered.



A Horsa glider with its nose through a hedge of a Normandy field.

The second echelon of Mission ELMIRA contained the 100 C-47s and gliders of serials 32 and 33 and a single aircraft from the 435th Troop Carrier Group carrying paratroopers that had aborted its drop the previous night. This echelon contained the guns of the Glider Field Artillery that could be transported in the larger Horsa glider along with a jeep and its five-man crew. Serial 32 carried the twelve 75mm howitzers of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion: 418 Airborne soldiers, 31 jeeps, 26 tons of ammunition and 25 tons of other equipment and supplies. Serial 33 consisted of twelve 105mm howitzers of the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion: 319 Airborne soldiers, 28 jeeps, 33 tons of ammunition and 23 tons of other equipment and supplies.

The second echelon took off still unaware of the situation on LZ W, but they did get a last-minute call to tell them to turn to the right after releasing their gliders. The lead aircraft of the 436th Troop Carrier Group took off at 20:37 and the lead aircraft of the 435th Troop Carrier Group at 20:40. As the 436th Troop Carrier Group climbed up and formed in its echelon of fours formation one Horsa broke loose, and a C-47 aborted its mission due to a burnt-out generator. The trip to the coast of Normandy was uneventful and the sun set a few minutes before they reached UTAH Beach. The Pathfinders on the LZ E had by now ceased their operations and the aircraft picked up the Eureka beacon set up by the 82nd on LZ O north of Sainte-Mère-Église.

When they were about five kilometres inland from the beach all hell broke loose as they ran into ground fire that made the paratrooper jumps of the previous night seem a cakewalk. The fire grew more intense the closer to LZ O they got and continued as they made their right turn away from the LZ and back to the beach.

The route to LZ O took the C-47s and the gliders over the German-held area of Turqueville and in range of the Germans north of Neuville-au-Plain. After they released their gliders the C-47s flew directly over the latter enemy forces. 33 C-47s of serial 32 received damage from the enemy ground fire but were able to return to England. In Serial 33 three of

the C-47s had to ditch on the way back due to the damage sustained, two made crash landings and 20 more were damaged but landed back at their base.

The glider release of the second echelon of Mission ELMIRA began at 22:55, five minutes ahead of schedule. Most of Serial 32's gliders were released a kilometre or two short of LZ O, though six gliders were released at least ten kilometres east of the LZ.

Serial 33 was more accurate, though five gliders were released over LZ W. The small fields of LZ O played havoc with the glider landings and the incoming ground fire as the gliders approached killed several of their passengers a minute or two before they landed. 56 of the 84 Horsa gliders were wrecked, 15 more were badly damaged and only 13 were still intact after they had come to rest. None of the Waco gliders survived intact and eight were destroyed.

Of the 196 glider pilots 10 were killed, 29 wounded or injured, and 7 were still missing a month later. The losses among the Airborne soldiers were 28 killed, 106 wounded or injured and a few were missing for more than two days. Again, the speed of exiting the glider and finding cover proved vital for survival and the unloading of their cargo was left until it was fully dark. 15 out of the 24 howitzers arrived in a serviceable condition, as did 42 out of the 49 jeeps and 28 out of the 39 trailers. By 17:15 on 8 June 1944, most of the men of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion had assembled and had six of their 75mm howitzers in action near Chef-du-Pont. The 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion fared better with half of their men and two howitzers assembling quickly. These two 105mm howitzers began firing at 09:30 on 7 June 1944 from a position 350 metres west of Sainte-Mère-Église and by the evening of the 8th, they had accounted for nearly all their men and had eight of their 105mm howitzers in action.



Dead American Airborne soldiers laid out in front of a wrecked Horsa glider.

The first serials of Colonel Harry L Lewis' 325th Glider Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, consisting of the Regimental Headquarters and Lieutenant Colonel Kellem R Boyd's 1st Battalion [1/325], took off from RAF

Ramsbury in England in the early hours of 7 June 1944 (D+1) and began to land at the Hiesville LZ close to Saint-Côme-du-Mont at 07:00 and ten minutes later at LZ O near Sainte-Mère-Église. Most glider infantrymen survived the landing and exited their gliders to secure their gear. The third and fourth serials, consisting of Lieutenant Colonel John H Swenson's 2nd Battalion [2/325] and Lieutenant Colonel Charles A Carrell's 3rd Battalion [3/325] landed at LZ W at about 07:50.

### D+1, 7 June 1944 to D+3, 9 June 1944

D+1, 7 June 1944, saw Major General Ridgeway's 82nd Airborne Division concentrate their efforts on securing Sainte-Mère-Église, whilst those units astride the River Merderet consolidated their positions to hold on to what they had already captured.

At La Fièvre the men of the newly arrived 1/325, now commanded by Major Teddy H Sanford, as Lieutenant Colonel Klemm R Boyd had been injured, augmented the paratroopers already in place. During the day the Grenadier-Regiment 1057 threatened their positions at various times, but the reinforced and resupplied paratroopers now had artillery and tanks in support. Major Sanford's 1/325 arrival at La Fièvre allowed Brigadier-General Gavin to reorganise his forces. He sent Colonel Lindquist's group from the 508th to Chef-du-Pont to reinforce and strengthen that position. Colonel Lindquist was ordered to reorganise the Chef-du-Pont bridgehead and link up with Lieutenant Colonel Shanley's men on Hill 30.

D+2, 8 June 1944, saw a change in emphasis within the 82nd Airborne Division's area of operations. Sainte-Mère-Église was now reasonably secure and Major General Ridgeway turned his attention to the situation along the River Merderet. Throughout the day the situation remained largely unchanged with the American forces continuing to hold the positions they had established on D-Day.

At Chef-du-Pont, Colonel Lindquist was assigned the task of securing the left flank of the division east of the River Merderet. He sent a force of approximately two companies strong to carry out this mission. During the day these two companies cleared the Carquebut-Eturville area without loss, taking 135 Germans prisoner, and established liaison with the 101st who were to their south. Colonel Lindquist did not, however, succeed in linking up with Lieutenant Colonel Shanley's force on Hill 30 due to the German dominance of the western end of the causeway. Lieutenant Colonel Shanley's group did get some reinforcements as several small groups and individual paratroopers, who had been dropped in the wrong place on D-Day, arrived at Hill 30 throughout the night. These included several machine guns which Lieutenant Colonel Shanley used to set up a roadblock to the south of his position.

In the evening of 8 June 1944, D+2, Colonel Lindquist had planned to send a convoy across the causeway at Chef-du-Pont and had radioed Lieutenant Colonel Shanley with orders for his force to clear the causeway road. Lieutenant Colonel Shanley sent a 23-man strong patrol under the command of Lieutenant Woodrow W Millsaps to do this, and they managed to knock out the German roadblock and clear the causeway to the eastern bank of the river. However, during this action by Lieutenant Millsaps' patrol, Colonel Lindquist noted that the causeway was receiving enemy fire



from the south of the River Douve, and he judged that it would be too hazardous to send the convoy across. The attempt was cancelled, and Lieutenant Colonel Shanley withdrew his covering force. By that time, however, Lieutenant Millsaps' group arrived at Chef-du-Pont. The men on Hill 30 needed urgent medical and ammunition resupply which Colonel Lindquist sent across the swamp.

There was, however, one significant development at La Fièvre during D+2, 8 June 1944, when a two-man patrol commanded by Lieutenant John Marr arrived at La Fièvre. They had been sent by Lieutenant Colonel Timmes to establish liaison with friendly troops and had crossed the inundated area using a sunken road. Close up it could be seen, and they followed it across the flooded Marais. They crossed the marsh to reach the eastern bank without incident and were rowed downstream by a Frenchman to where the men of the 1/325 had taken up positions. Lieutenant John Marr recalled:

*"We spent D-Day night and D+1 in a perimeter defence, backed up against the water in what is now Timmes' Orchard, which is very near Amfreville and that was a place that was called the Grey Castle. It was an old French castle, and that happened to be the 91st German Division command post. We patrolled out ... and of course, we got repulsed by automatic weapons fire and some mortar fire on D+1. And D+2, Timmes sent me on a patrol, at about 8:00 in the morning, to go to the Grey Castle behind some tall trees.*

*I went back, and I reported to Timmes that nobody was going to go into that castle today through the fire that they were doing as we approached through the wooded area. And so then he said, 'Well, why don't you go across to the northeast and see what you see ... if you can locate any friendly troops over there.*

*So, I took Carter, my runner, and we went out on a road running to the north of Timmes' Orchard to the water's edge. And we found out there was a submerged cobblestone road headed toward the railroad section house, which was on the far side of the water, about 1,200 yards away. So, we just started following that road out there, in broad daylight, and the Germans never took notice of us at all, never fired on us the entire trip.*

*The head of the family that occupied the section house offered to take us up the river in his boat, which he guided with a long pole. He poled us up the river to the far side and to the treed area where the 325th Glider Infantry had landed and assembled on D+1.*

*One of the battalion commanders of the regiment put us in a jeep and headed up the road to deliver us to the division command post so that we could tell our story. And on the way to the division command post, we met General Ridgway coming in our direction in his jeep and I briefed General Ridgway as to what we were doing over there.*

*We had no communication with the division during those three days that we were in there in Timmes' Orchard area.*

*So, Ridgway told the battalion commander to take us on to the division command post, which he did."*

At the Divisional Headquarters, Brigadier-General Gavin was planning a link-up between Lieutenant Colonel Timmes's men, Colonel Millett's group and his force at La Fièvre that night. The intent was that, once this link-up was achieved, the combined forces would turn southeast and descend on the western end of the causeway at Cauquigny to establish a bridgehead.

After dark on D+2, 8 June 1944, Colonel Millett's group and the 1/325 began moving towards Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' position at Timmes Orchard. Colonel Millett's column moved east from their defensive position northwest of Amfreville intending to cross the 1,000 metres that separated the two isolated contingents of the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Whilst they were on the move, they were engaged by the enemy at Grey Castle. This broke up their column and Colonel Millett and several others became detached from the main body. They were subsequently taken prisoner and the remainder of the column withdrew northeast towards the river.

The 1/325 approached Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' position from the west. Lieutenant John Marr led them from La Fièvre along the road to Sainte-Mère-Église as far as the railway and then along the rail track north. He guided them across the Marais using the sunken road he had discovered that morning until they reached dry land near Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' position. On reaching the western edge of the Marais they too drew fire from the Grey Castle, which was a few hundred metres to their right. Captain Dave Stokely's Company C 1/325 was detached to deal with these buildings whilst the remainder continued to join up with Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' men at Timmes Orchard. Lieutenant John Marr recalled:

*"Somewhere around ... probably 9:30 or 10:00 by the time it was dark enough, the battalion and their vehicles went down the road, crossed over the railroad, went into Timmes' Orchard and the battalion commander met with Timmes and made a battle plan to attack the Germans from the rear, on the western approach of the causeway."*

The link-up achieved, Lieutenant Colonel Timmes and Major Sanford planned an attack against the Germans holding the western end of the causeway. Brigadier-General Gavin had ordered Lieutenant Timmes' men to protect the flank of Major Sanford's 1/325 while the three companies of the 1st Battalion made the main assault on the causeway. Lieutenant John Marr was assigned to guide Captain Stokely's Company C 1/325.

Major Sanford's 1/325 swung southeast intent on seizing the western end of the causeway leading from La Fièvre at Cauquigny. It was early in the morning on D+3, 9 June 1944 and as they approached the causeway, they were engaged by the defending German infantrymen from the Grenadier-Regiment 1057.

After Captain Stokely had fanned the men of Company C out in a skirmish formation, they set off the German warning devices which revealed their presence to the enemy. Company C advanced into a field and pushed forward to a sunken road that neither Captain Stokely nor Lieutenant Marr knew existed. The shaking out of the company into skirmish formation slowed the advance and changed their direction away from Company B, which was part of the attack. The scout on Company C's flank lost liaison with Company B and the coordination of the attack by the two companies broke down. Company C advanced and when they were around 25 metres from a sunken road, that looked like a hedgerow in the darkness, a hidden group of German soldiers began shouting and raised a few white sheets on poles out of the nearby hedgerow. It appeared that the Germans wanted to surrender, but Lieutenant Marr warned Captain Stokely that this was a common German ruse intended to lure the Americans out of concealment. Lieutenant Marr advised that Company C charge the enemy position, but Captain Stokely sent a Sergeant from his company forward to negotiate surrender terms. Before the Sergeant made it to the German line, the enemy opened fire with machine guns from both flanks. The German defenders put up a fierce fight and their strong resistance ultimately led to the withdrawal of the 1/325 after they had sustained heavy losses. Lieutenant Marr recalled:

*"The enfilading fire took its toll; people were out in an oat field. And so there was a tremendous exchange of fire in there, and as daylight broke, the attack failed, but not before a soldier named DeGlopper, Charles DeGlopper, had gone on a rampage with his Browning automatic rifle. And he took out a lot of the defenders and kept going until they finally killed him."*

During the firefight, PFC Charles N DeGlopper's platoon had become separated from the rest of Company C 1/325. Cut off and engaged by a vastly superior enemy, PFC DeGlopper's platoon began to take casualties. The enemy threatened to make a flanking movement that would have exposed the American platoon's position in the sunken road where it had taken cover. Realising what was happening, PFC DeGlopper volunteered to cover his comrades with his BAR whilst they withdrew to the hedgerow 10 metres to their rear. Unable, to see clearly, PFC DeGlopper climbed out of the ditch at the side of the road and began firing at the enemy positions. Engulfed in a torrent of enemy bullets, PFC DeGlopper was wounded but stayed on his feet and continued firing. Struck again, he began to go down but continued to fire his BAR. Kneeling on the road, PFC DeGlopper fired burst after burst until he was finally cut down. PFC Charles N DeGlopper made the ultimate sacrifice, giving his life to save those in his platoon. In recognition, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour. His citation reads:

*"The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to PFC Charles N DeGlopper, United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action above and beyond the call of duty. PFC DeGlopper was a member of Company C, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division, on 9 June 1944 advancing with the forward platoon to secure a bridgehead across the Merderet River at La Fièvre, France. At dawn the platoon had penetrated an outer line of machineguns and riflemen, but in so doing had become cut off from the rest of the company. Vastly superior forces began a decimation of the stricken*

*unit and put in motion a flanking manoeuvre which would have completely exposed the American platoon in a shallow roadside ditch where it had taken cover. Detecting this danger, PFC DeGlopper volunteered to support his comrades by fire from his automatic rifle while they attempted a withdrawal through a break in a hedgerow 40 yards to the rear. Scorning a concentration of enemy automatic weapons and rifle fire, he walked from the ditch onto the road in full view of the Germans and sprayed the hostile positions with assault fire. He was wounded, but he continued firing. Struck again, he started to fall; and yet his grim determination and valiant fighting spirit could not be broken. Kneeling in the roadway, weakened by his grievous wounds, he levelled his heavy weapon against the enemy and fired burst after burst until killed outright. He was successful in drawing the enemy action away from his fellow soldiers, who continued the fight from a more advantageous position and established the first bridgehead over the Merderet. In the area where he made his intrepid stand his comrades later found the ground strewn with dead Germans and many machineguns and automatic weapons which he had knocked out of action. PFC DeGlopper's gallant sacrifice and unflinching heroism while facing insurmountable odds were in great measure responsible for a highly important tactical victory in the Normandy Campaign."*



PFC Charles N DeGlopper.

When Colonel Harry L Lewis reported 1/325's failure to secure the western end of the causeway to Divisional headquarters Brigadier-General Gavin decided to try to force a crossing at La Fièvre from the eastern bank.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles A Carrell's 3/325 was already on its way to La Fièvre from Chef-du-Pont when they received the order to attack. Lieutenant Colonel Carrell was ordered to cross the causeway from the east and, once the attack had begun, they were to keep moving. Captain John B Sauls' Company L, which was the leading company in the column, was to be the spearhead. Major Charles Murphy's Company I and Captain James M Harney's Company K were to follow closely behind.



The preparatory barrage was to commence at 10:30 and 3/325 was to be ready to start crossing the causeway at 10:45. A reinforced company from the 507th under the command of Captain Robert Dempsey Rae was to support 3/325 from their positions south of the bridge. Captain Rae received additional orders from Brigadier-General Gavin that told him to move immediately to support the attack should 3/325 fail to force the crossing.

As the lead elements of 3/325 crossed the railway the preparatory barrage began. Whilst the preparatory barrage was being put down the supporting American tanks moved up to about 100 metres short of the bridge and began to engage any targets as they presented themselves. A smokescreen to cover their approach was laid down as the 3/325 moved along the winding road towards the river. As they neared the bridge, however, they were engaged by heavy machine gun fire from across the river because the smoke screen had yet to concentrate sufficiently, and the enemy could see their advance. Captain Sauls' Company L swung left to use the cover of the stonewall behind which Captain Rae's men were firing and they could move closer to the bridge. At 10:45 the artillery barrage lifted, and the attack began.

Once across the bridge, the assaulting troops of the 325th had about 500 metres of exposed causeway to cover. Captain Sauls led his company forward in a mad dash across the causeway, but only a few reached the western end. The charge over 500 metres in the face of fierce enemy small-arms and mortar fire proved too much for most of them. Those that did reach the far end of the causeway deployed along the trail to the south and began to return fire. Many who hesitated or faltered were hit and these initial casualties induced even more hesitation. The dead, dying, wounded and reluctant men out on the exposed causeway began to cause congestion making the crossing even more difficult. To make matters worse, one of the supporting tanks tried to cross the causeway after the leading platoon of Company L and this hit an American mine that had been put down to stop the German armour crossing. This crippled tank together with the hulk of one of the destroyed enemy tanks created a bottleneck that slowed down the assaulting Gliderborne infantrymen even more. The platoons of Company L continued to cross and those that reached the west bank began to form an anchor along the road to the right. As more men arrived at the western end of the causeway, they began to work their way along the edge of the swamp to the south, clearing enemy positions and buildings as they went.

With Captain Sauls' Company L 3/325 across the causeway, Major Murphy led his Company I across. They had been ordered to deploy to the right of the main road and clear the ground northwards along the river and around the church at Cauquigny. Even though Company I sustained heavy casualties during the crossing, they carried out their mission with comparative ease. The Germans in the Cauquigny area had been subjected to heavy supporting fire from the 505th on the eastern bank and when Company I appeared they were quick to surrender.

Captain Harney's Company K was to mop up any enemy resistance. When they crossed the causeway, the bridgehead at the western end had not been extended to a depth sufficient for mopping-up operations to begin. Captain Harney decided to push on along the main road that was the centre axis to widen the bridgehead.

Throughout the assault by 3/325, Brigadier-General Gavin became increasingly concerned about the congestion of the causeway and the effect that this was having on the speed of the troops crossing. He concluded that 3/325 were not crossing quickly enough and committed Captain Rae's reinforced company from the 507th to add weight to the attack.

Captain Rae's company moved on to the causeway at about the same time as Company K 3/325. With orders to move across the causeway sweeping up any stragglers as they crossed, the men of Captain Rae's company intermingled with Company K during the crossing. On reaching the far end, Captain Rae pushed westwards through the centre of the bridgehead intent on seizing the high ground near Le Motey.

The four separate companies of the 82nd on the west bank of the River Merderet were now fighting their own battles. Captain Sauls' Company L 3/325 had pushed to the south along the edge of the swamp and were clearing the enemy positions and buildings on the left flank; Major Murphy's Company I had swung right on crossing the causeway and was clearing the buildings and enemy positions at Cauquigny on the right flank; Captain Harney's Company K had pushed along the road leading west from the causeway to widen the bridgehead in its centre; and Captain Rae's reinforced Company from the 507th was attempting to advance towards the high ground around Le Motey.

In the centre, Captain Harney's Company K established a firm anchor position, and, in the absence of any central command, he tried to coordinate the efforts of the four separate forces. Part of Captain Rae's force pushed on towards the Le Motey area, whilst the remainder broke left to try to tie the bridgehead together touching base with Captain Sauls' Company L. A platoon from Company I was to strike out to the north to link up with 1/325 and Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' 2/507 at Timmes' Orchard. The force moving on Le Motey got into the village when American artillery fire began to fall on their heads. Unknown to the American Airborne soldiers on the western bank of the River Merderet, the artillery had been ordered to put indirect fire down on Le Motey to deny its use by the Germans as an assembly point to mount a counterattack. This artillery fire had a nullifying effect on what Captain Harney was trying to do, and the platoon from his Company I was held back whilst efforts were made to establish comms with the artillery to get them to cease firing on Le Motey. When these efforts proved fruitless, Captain Rae ordered his men in Le Motey to withdraw, and they pulled back to Cauquigny to become the reserve. When they were safely in position Captain Rae despatched a patrol to the northwest to link up with Lieutenant Colonel Timmes and the platoon from Company I rejoined its company on the right flank.

The withdrawal of Captain Rae's men from Le Motey left a gap between Company K and Company L and resulted in Company K becoming exposed on both flanks. Enemy small-arms fire soon began to build up against Company K from the Le Motey area and a group of German infantrymen were discovered amongst the hedgerows to their left. To counter this threat, Company I was ordered to move up to cover Company K's left flank, but, due to the dispersed nature of their men, their move was delayed. Finding his position untenable without flank protection Captain Harney was forced to move his men back a couple of hedgerows towards the causeway. When Company I finally made their move, they pushed forward to cover Company K's original positions and thus found themselves exposed as Company K had been. Receiving enemy fire from its flanks Major Murphy's Company I pulled back and one platoon, believing that it was being counterattacked in strength, broke. This panic was checked before it got out of hand and Major Murphy's Company I pushed forward to reestablish the line.

The patrol from Captain Rae's reinforced company reached Lieutenant Colonel Timmes, whose position near Amfreville was now in better order. The pressure exerted by the Germans that had forced 1/325 back earlier in the day had eased

with the developments at the western end of the causeway and they were now able to move if required. The northern flank of the bridgehead ceased to be of tactical concern and Brigadier-General Gavin was able to concentrate on the situation that was developing in the centre.

Late in the afternoon of D+3, Colonel Lindquist sent a mixed group from the 508th across the Chef-du-Pont causeway to link up with Lieutenant Colonel Shanley at Hill 30, thereby extending the bridgehead to the south. Meanwhile, 3/325 on the western bank of the Merderet River in the vicinity of La Fièrre Bridge began to go firm and establish defensive positions. Captain Harney's Company K was on the right, Major Murphy's Company I in the centre and Captain Sauls' Company L on the left. The defensive line they established was formed in time to withstand a last-ditch counterattack by the Germans that evening.

Whilst the bridgehead to the west of La Fièrre causeway was now reasonably secure Brigadier-General Gavin was still concerned about its integrity, so he ordered Captain Rae's reinforced company from the 507th back into the line. They were positioned to the right of Company K 3/325 and extended the defensive line northwards where it was eventually tied in with Lieutenant Colonel Timmes' men and 1/325 near Amfreville.

By the end of D+3, the bridgehead on the western bank of the River Merderet centred on the La Fièrre causeway extended from Lieutenant Colonel Shanley's 2/508 at Hill 30 in the south to Lieutenant Colonel Timmes 2/507 at Timmes' Orchard in the north. Just before dark that night an outpost was set up in the Le Motey area without any opposition, and, by nightfall, the bridgehead had been successfully established ready for exploitation the following day.

For his actions at La Fièrre on D+3, 9 June 1944, Captain Robert D Rae was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, 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 Captain (Infantry) Robert Dempsey Rae (ASN: 0-1288948), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Commanding Officer, Company C, 1st Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division, in action against enemy forces on 9 June 1944, near Ste. Mere Eglise, France. Elements of a Division were ordered to establish a bridgehead across the Merderet River to relieve isolated groups of the Division which had been holding fast on the other side of the river. Attainment of this objective involved a frontal assault across the bridge and over the river against heavy enemy fire. One company started the attack and was pinned down by the full force of the enemy fire. In order to maintain the momentum a composite company under Captain Rae was ordered to pass through the unit that was pinned down. Captain Rae placed himself at the head of the company and led the assault directly into the concentrated rifle, machine gun, mortar and artillery fire of the enemy. He moved with such speed that he carried his men across the bridge, reorganized and pressed his initial advantage and overran the enemy positions. The courage and superior*

*leadership displayed by Captain Rae exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 82d Airborne Division, and the United States Army.”*

Captain John B Sauls and Major Charles Murphy were both wounded on 9 June 1944, and Captain Sauls and Captain James M Harney were awarded the Silver Star.

## Look Forward

In Part Fourteen of D-Day, 6 June 1944 – The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I start looking at the landing at UTAH Beach by the 4th Infantry Division on D-Day.

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