

The following is an oral account of my experiences on D-Day the 6th of June 1944 while assigned as a platoon commander in Company "A" of the 508th PIR, 82nd A/B Division.

My name is George D. Lamm of Hull, Massachusetts and I am a retired Major of Infantry.

I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts on July 7, 1918. My father, Arthur Julius Lamm, worked at the arsenal on the Springfield Rifle 1903, bolt action. He later worked for Mr. Garand on the M-1 Semi-automatic rifle of World War II. During the Depression years we moved where the work was and settled in Pittsfield, Massachusetts where I attended high school. In my junior year I joined the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) for two hitches in Spencer, Mass. There we worked on survival of hurricane blown-down timber and worked, while lead by forester's firefighting team, with New England Fire Company. I returned to Pittsfield to graduate from St. Joseph's High School in June 1937.

On March 31, 1942 I was called to active military service with the 26th Infantry Division at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts.

I was commissioned from Buck Sergeant to Second Lieutenant in July 1942 and volunteered for the paratroopers and assigned to 508th PIR in October of that year. After advance training we sailed for north Ireland and there trained in "long-range patrolling" and "survival techniques" behind the enemy lines.

During March 1944 we made a highly secure and secret move to Nottingham, England at Wollaton Park near the ancient home of the Sheriff of Nottingham ... also, where Robin Hood, in legend, hunted and gave to the poor, we made our final preparations for the invasion of Fortress Europe. Many troopers swore that during the bugle call for reveille, if you listened hard you would hear Robin's bullhorn echoing and calling his band of "Merry Men".

In April of 1944 we practiced our combat jumping and assembly for the Big Day. Our destination was a top secret in the highest echelons of command.

During a night [practice] jump the air column went off course and we drew fire from the "friendly ack-ack" batteries around London, and we landed on drop zones unknown to our leaders. Some of us were unceremoniously "captured" by the elderly home army militia. They claimed that our broken English reminded them of the "Jerries".

On or about the first of June we woke one morning to a full alert; covered busses had arrived to take us to airfields. Our combat load was issued with special equipment, and with combat gear we were off to our marshalling area for D-Day!

We studied sand tables and aerial photos of European areas, but with no hint of countryside itself. This information would be withheld until just prior to the jump. We, however, were issued "Escape Kits" made up primarily of a small compass which could fit nicely in certain parts of the body, a very strong thin "file" which could be taped to the inner upper arm or thigh, a thin silk map that could be folded into a small oval and sewn within the seams of a jumpsuit. Included along with all these wonderful gadgets were \$50.00 of script invasion currency, this to be printed later as it would include the symbol of the country of our destination. Many "betting pools" were formed to guess the honored captive country such as France, Belgium, Holland or Norway as favored target areas.

The invasion money was to be used to assist in foraging for necessary items needed for our mission. Some private enterprises would spring up to extract the trooper's "sixpence" during the first few days of the invasion. In addition to the "panny cake" and cider roadside stands, rumors suggested other goods would be available at times.

During earlier preparations, most combat commanders with initial D-Day missions were taken to a castle where we met combat leaders of all echelons who would be in evidence on the beaches and drop zones early on D-Day. Our overall leader would be "Fightin' Joe Collins" of Guadalcanal fame. He was appointed our corps commander. He looked like a bandy rooster with pugnacious mannerisms. He said, "I drove the Japanese into the sea, and I want you all to know, especially the troopers and Rangers, that the beachhead troops of the land-forces would reach 'areas of combat' on schedule." It was exciting for we young officers and we cheered him. We took his words back to the "warriors in wait" and they cheered. After all, "This was IT" – not only what we trained and waited for many months, but many of us harbored

thoughts that this was what we were “born” for ... just this action, “The Liberation for Fortress Europe”. The troopers, Rangers, beach engineers, underwater demo teams, etc. would be the FIRST there. Perhaps it was a somewhat dubious honor, but a very uncertain one indeed.

We also spent time with our aircraft crews and got our timing signal straightened out. This would include the important coordination of pilot “up front” to jumpmaster in the “back door”. They would have intercom during the trip in. Ammo, commo, medical bundle must be viewed by each and any door bundle must be approved by both.

During these activities just prior to the BIG DAY, we woke up and were briefed on destinations. France, an old ally, was it and they were waiting.

The sand tables suddenly had names that we would never forget ... Chef-du-Pont, Ste. Mere Eglise, LaFiere, etcetera, and suddenly our mission was magnified with reality, and we received our tasks on our initial objectives. The 2nd Platoon (my command for a year) was given splendid missions that we thought important, “Assemble after jump and move to Hill 30, dig in a road block” (one that would deter enemy forces from the beaches) “Then take a patrol to the bridge at LaFiere, and meet up with _____ there. It was also thought that the demolition should be dropped with qualified personnel. There were five of my men and myself with certification and we were ready for it. This called for twenty pounds of C #2 plastic charges on each demo-trooper with detonation caps placed correctly in the helmet or inside of instep of boots, a place where collision of equipment might not set them off. A tracer bullet passing through the plastic charge could ignite it and cause it to burn prior to explosion, enough time to cut the charge loose before the intensity would cause an explosion. The detonating cap would take a little bending at times across the fingers.

On this evening as I was briefing the troopers on the sand table and aerial maps, I was called to report to the Chaplain. I told him that I had already made my Confession, but he broke the news of my Dad’s death. My Dad had a very serious stroke before I left the States, and I recalled then how proud of me he was because I had Jump Wings and was a second Lieutenant. He made “signs” to my mother that I must go overseas with my unit. These memories passed through my mind when the Chaplain said that I must stay at the airfield until after the invasion when I could then go home. I told him my Dad had already made the decision for me.

The brother of one of my Sergeants (Sergeant Preston) had also died, and we spent the night talking about our families. During our conversation, the Air Corps Security offered us a bottle of cognac!?! This was of course a “no-no”, but the spirit was there. We both totally forgot or blocked out our losses and it did not fully dawn on me that Dad was indeed dead until around D-Day +7.

General Gavin spoke to us and told us of the combat standards he expected, and that he would be Force “A” Commander for the initial taking of objective. This placed all three parachute regiments at his command. We had no idea how much we would see him personally as we went about our combat duties. We had the highest respect for him as a combat leader. He was a general of the mould and tradition of the Civil War young aggressive generals who lead their men by personality traits of courage, knowledge of tactics, and outstanding battlefield decisions. He demonstrated the ability of choosing to be in the right place at the right time to influence the tide of battle. Jim Gavin was, at this time, the youngest combat general in the United States Army and we were the youngest combat troops. He could be seen in midst of battle with his M-1 rifle in one hand and a map in the other with a radio man and an aide. He would break “cover” suddenly and head directly for you to obtain a “situation” report, and you best know the situation when he arrived!

The jump on 5 June was cancelled due to bad weather and the invasion rescheduled for 6 June, rain or shine it would go ...

So it was at about 2315 hours (11:15 pm) on 5 June that we were airborne. The 508th main body would be over Drop Zone “N” around 0200 hour, and pathfinders about 0115 hour. We roared into the air and started circling southern England to pick up the air columns from other airfields and then began our approach onto the landfall selected in France.

The flight plan called for the air column to approach the Cherbourg Peninsula from the west side just north of Guernsey and Jersey Islands, which were occupied by Jerry. The last navigational aid as the 508 flight

turned into the west central beach was named Hoboken and this turn into an easterly heading was a gradual turn. At the paratroop briefing we jumpmasters had been told we might [encounter] flak and searchlights coming toward us at the turn, but they would disappear as the night fighters took them under fire.

This is exactly what happened as I leaned out of the door peering under the belly of the plane. Quickly we had descended somewhat in altitude and crossed the beach where we received rifle fire. Sounds of hail-like substance hit the wings making a "pic & pac" noise. We could make out villages burning over the countryside as the moon dipped in and out of the cloud banks.

Our heading once over land was due east straight across to the east coastal beach where our seaborne forces would hit in a few hours. We were instructed to be ready to jump upon eight minutes from the west coastal area. The troopers were standing up and ready to close up and exit when we suddenly hit one fog bank after another. I checked for my following planes after the first fog bank, and after that they were gone and we seemed alone.

The pilot reported an expansive section of water ahead, the green light flashed ON, and then "all hell broke loose", as the saying goes. Small arms fire from below increased, flak was coming up and the pilot went to evasive action. The troopers were sprawled over the floor and some penetration through the aircraft floor was reported. As we bobbed around and got our troopers close up on the door, the pilot called and said we had missed the Drop Zone and were going out to sea over the landing beaches. I requested he turn back and drop us in a quiet area. This he accomplished and we slowed down and jumped.

As I jumped my right knee and foot tangled with the lines and I was suspended sideways and I had dropped quite a distance from the other chutes. Suddenly I hit a hedgerow and my rifle stock was broken in the landing. I pulled out my trench knife and cut the chute loose. Taking care, I cut off the harness, pulled my "45" and searched for the troopers and bundles. The only person I ran into came through a hedge opening, saw me, knocked me down, and ran off leaving his rifle. It was a bolt-action. I had met my first "Jerry" in France.

A herd of cattle appeared coming up the lane and I decided to join them and accompany them to their destination. They offered concealment and an opportunity to size up the situation. I stayed within the middle of the herd and up ahead I smelled cigarette smoke and saw flashes of light. Surely they were Americans. I worked my way under a fellow straddling a fence and pulled him down. We tumbled around ... he was one of us!

He told me that the 505 Parachute Infantry Regiment Pathfinders were just up the hedgerow, and gliders were now coming in on the night lights and radar. The officer in charge, I knew. He was Mike Chester, Commander of the 505 PIR Pathfinders. He directed me to the assembly area, and I was sent to Division Headquarters where the "508" men were coming in. An officer came by and asked me if I was from the 508 PIR and he took me to a trooper leaning against a tree. I had been told that it was General Ridgeway, the Division Commander and ranking general officer now in "Fortress Europe". The General came forward, grabbed my shoulder and asked if I was a "508" officer. When this was confirmed he laughed and said, "I have forty men for you from the 508 PIR. Take them to the LaFiere bridge and help Colonel Lindquist take it. He directed me to a big, burly sergeant with a red beard, and, "Lo", I had a combat command!

When I asked directions to the bridge I was told it was straight down the road, and to follow the sound of the guns. The general laughed again. We formed two columns and hit the road toward the bridge. Dawn was breaking as we lit out.

Ahead of us we soon saw a platoon of troops marching in the direction we were headed. Our scouts reported that they were Germans. We halted and decided to ambush them further on down the road. AS we swung out to flank them, we discovered they were engaged by a force to their front. They had been ambushed by another column of ours.

Bypassing the fight, we were continuing toward the bridge when a jeep from a side road roared past us. In it was a captain who we presumed was a glider pilot since he had a jeep. He and his companion headed toward the bridge and shortly after he passed us, we heard an explosion and saw a ball of fire. They had hit a land mine. I ran ahead and found them both very dead. I picked up the Captain's map case. He was

Captain King from the Division's Anti-tank Battalion. His invasion was over. I kept his map case and lost it in the Holland jump in September.

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