

LOOK OUT BELOW!

(Continued from Page 1)
The weather been bad and the jump postponed.

Scarcely anyone touched his eyes, about turning in your chute if it didn't open and getting a new one, were absent this morning. Even the jump school song, "Gory, Gory, What a Helluva Way to Die," sung to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," was neglected.

Each man was wrapped in his own thoughts as we marched to the packing sheds to pick up the chutes we had packed for ourselves. Each of us checked the all-important break cord on his chute over and over again. All sorts of tragic possibilities crowded in on our imaginations as we tried to concentrate on the jump master's instructions.

"Don't get excited. Stay cool!" he shouted.

"Just remember what you have been taught. Don't stand up before you get the signal; don't crowd towards the door. Follow the man in front of you quickly, but don't go out on his back. Keep your chin in until the chute opens, and then check your canopy. If you should happen to have a streamer — you won't, these chutes always open — but if you should have a streamer, just pull your reserve and throw it away from your body so you won't get tangled in the suspension lines. Now listen, you men, you're a good class, and I don't think there is a yellow guy here. I don't want anyone freezing in the door; I don't want any quitters! Now put on your helmets and line up."

They divided us up so that one officer would lead each group or "sitch" of ten enlisted men. As I left the officers to join the ten enlisted men in my sitch, a lieutenant who had often said to me that he wished that he had been brought up in some religion, quipped, "I hope your Boss isn't mad at us today, Chaplain."

Just before we boarded the plane, a little red-headed fellow next to me said, "Father, I was on duty Saturday night and didn't get a good class, and often said to me that he wished that he had been brought up in some religion, quipped, 'I hope your Boss isn't mad at us today, Chaplain.'"

"But the motors will start up in a minute," I replied. "You had better make it snappy." With the rest of the men wondering what was going on, he leaned over and whispered in my ear. After this absolute man asked him, "Do you feel better now?"

"Father," he said with a grin, "that was better than a reserve chute."

As the plane taxied across the runway, the men fell silent. The plane picked up speed, and everyone's jaw muscles tightened, and, as if to show that it was deliberate, each man adjusted the two chin straps on his helmet.

The air became cooler in the cabin, and when the plane had cleared the pine trees at the end of the runway, the jumpmaster eased the tension somewhat by walking down the aisle and helping the men loosen their safety belts. He lit a cigarette, and we followed suit. The plane circled over the packing sheds, and we saw hundreds of tiny men down there waiting for these planes to dump their human cargo and come back to take them up for the identical insane purpose.

Fort Benning looked awfully small from the air; the baseball park resembled a billiard table, and the muddy Chattahoochee seemed tiny enough to step across. I spotted a Catholic chapel, and for a moment in spirit I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament.

"STAND UP!" shouted the jumpmaster.

He was standing in the open door, and the prop blast wrinkled and whipped the skin of his face like a dish towel in the wind.

My legs turned to jelly, and there were butterflies in my stomach. Why couldn't I have been satisfied in some other branch of the service like the...

"HOOK UP!" We hooked our snap fasteners onto the cables. Hand around the inside of the static line just below the snap that's right. Dozens of instructions began to race through my head. "Jump clear of the door... keep chin in close... don't forget to count... check the canopy... don't forget to count!... don't forget to count!... don't forget to count!"

"CHECK YOUR EQUIPMENT!" Each man glanced at the chute of the man in front of him to be sure that it hadn't broken open prematurely.

The last man in the stick called out, "Ten O.K.!" as he snipped the leg of the man in front of him.

"Nine O.K."

"Eight O.K." and so on down to myself.

"One O.K., Sergeant," I said as the pilot throttled the engines down and the red light just over the door went on.

"STAND IN THE DOOR!" The jump master stepped aside, and I took his place in the door. The men were pressing against each other. The plane was rocking and losing some altitude. The green light went on.

"ARE YOU READY?"

The men broke the tension with a roar, "ALL READY!"

"LET'S GO!"

The jumpmaster slapped my leg, and out I went. My exit must have been poor, for the prop blast spun me like a top. Head over heels I went, aware of nothing but my absolute helplessness. I forgot to count.

The only rule that I observed was keeping my chin pressed into my chest. It was a good thing I remembered that, for, just as the chute opened with a loud smack jerking me almost into unconsciousness, I felt the sharp sting of the suspension lines strike my face.

In a fraction of a second the opening of the chute slowed me down from almost ninety miles an hour to zero. Suddenly everything was quiet and peaceful.

This quiet and peace of being a lone, suspended between heaven and earth by a beautiful canopy of silk, was a pleasant sensation. The thrill was nothing at all like what I had expected. The excitement, nervousness, and tension were gone, replaced by a feeling of great satisfaction and genuine enjoyment. The descent was scarcely perceptible, and every second of it was precious.

I remember that I had that same feeling once before, as a little boy, when I rode an escalator down a flight in a Minneapolis department store.

As I neared the ground, the rate of descent seemed to increase greatly. I grasped my risers and made half a body turn to get the wind in my back. (This is done by grasping the risers above the head with arms crossed and then pulling down.) THEN I HIT!

Something snapped in my leg, and a sharp pain ran up and down my leg without seeming to localize. I managed to collapse the chute after it had dragged me for about a hundred feet. For a time, after disengaging myself from the harness, I lay there gasping for breath and thinking, "If this is a broken leg or a banged-up knee, it might give me a chance to back out of this foolish business gracefully. Jumping is a boy's racket, not something for a thirty-year-old man."

I got up carefully and tested the leg. It seemed to respond normally. With a sigh I thought, "Well, I guess I'm stuck with this respect and esteem and even love for the men in it."

We carried our parachutes to the waiting trucks. The men were jubilant, all talking at once, each man describing with great animation every detail of his jump. They were bursting with pride.

"How'd you land? I hit like a sack."

"What an opening shock... looka here!" proudly displaying

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Paratroopers of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team make a training jump. Photo was taken in 1954.

the rapidly discoloring riser marks on his shoulders.

"Any business for the meat wagon? Was anybody hurt?"

"Yeah, the guy who lit next to me pulled his legs up and landed on his tail; they carried him off on a stretcher."

"I'd like to go right up and do it again!"

"How about it, Chaplain? How'd you land? That makes you a double skydipper, doesn't it?"

It was impossible not to share their good spirits.

We sensed, too, that our mutual experience really made us brothers in the airborne family.

Thereafter, though they would often fight among themselves, paratroopers having trouble with the civilians, with the law, or with men of other units would just have to yell, "Geronimo!" and from every tavern, park, and sidewalk within earshot would come running the men with the parachute wings on their breast.

This loyalty caused the Army a great many headaches before it paid off in Normandy, Southern France, Leyte, Holland, Bastogne, Germany, and much later in Korea. Now, as we rode back to the sheds to shake the dirt and weeds out of the parachutes, the men broke into their song, "Gory, Gory, What a Helluva Way to Die," finishing strongly on the last phrase, "They poured him from his boots."

By the end of the week we had made the five qualifying jumps, received a certificate to this effect, had the wings pinned above the left breast pocket by the school commandant. We then hastened to acquire the overbearing-mannerisms and obnoxious characteristics of pre-combat paratroopers.

Jump boots, the unique patch on the cap and the wings were badges of such distinction that the jumper considered himself outside the law, above observing the customary courtesies toward civilians, and in a position to scorn all other branches of the service.

There is no difficulty in distinguishing the paratrooper who has seen combat from the one who has not. Combat was one day to mellow him and give him a wholesome respect for the foot infantry like the 28th Division, which, though reeling from smashing blows of five converging German divisions, still delayed the enemy long enough for the 101st Airborne to set up their impregnable defense at Bastogne.

He never dreamed of Benning that he would one day be rescued by six armored divisions (the natural enemy of airborne) which had broken through the encircling German lines. He was even to learn that the air corps had its good points, as ammunition, gasoline, food, and other essential supplies were dropped just in time to prevent a great disaster for the airborne. That mission was a

BOOK SHELF

A Convert's Recollections

By Sister Margaret Teresa, Nazareth College

"And Yet So New," by Arnold Lunn. Sheed '59. (Feb. 11), 224 pp. \$3.75.

"Late have I loved Thee, thou Beauty so old and yet so new." Well named out of Augustine's towering mountain of prayers, the Confessions, is this fifty-first book of Arnold Lunn, convert, ski-master, mountain-lover, novelist, biographer, world-traveler and lecturer, professor (at Notre Dame), debater (with the unscrupulous McCabe, with Joad, Knox, Haldane, G. G. Coulton; with Senator Douglas and Irwin Edman in America) and analyst of our times. Here Lunn looks back over seventy years, and looks ahead from an unusual vantage-point.

Non-Catholics will always come to a debate, says Lunn, and prove it out of his long experience. A chapter on "The Two Internationals" deals with the worldwide opposition of the Church and Communism in terms of the immediate future.

Ronald Knox and Hilaire Belloc are seen from fresh angles, and everywhere through the book come shorter portraits of other personalities who have made a bit of history.

Lunn's real love for America brings him to total frankness in the "Least We Forget" chapter (One would almost think he had our reception of Mikoyan in mind, prophetically!) — and he gathers together many notable opinions on really showing our solidarity with oppressed peoples, many notes on the effect behind the Iron Curtain of not doing so; suggests reducing cultural relations with Russia to a minimum, reminds us that Pius XII said, "The free world is now laying wreaths on the bodies of tortured Hungarians, but nothing has been done to prevent the further killing of human beings."

Throughout the book, as background and sometimes excitingly as foreground, run the white peaks of the sicer's mountains, the mountains that have ever kept him aware and steadfast in the consciousness of God.

Sir Arnold's experience of the Faith in the 30's was related in "Now I See" and in "Within That City."

IN THE PRESENT volume appear the splendid fruits of this life so intensely lived: the joy of the climb, the relish of companionship, the lessons of tragedy seen on the way, the powerful and earnest counsel offered to the uninitiated who have as yet no fighting spirit — that is to us; the rest of us, many of us who are Catholic.

We haven't climbed our mountains yet, for brought too many with us to enjoy even a small foray of heaven. "The Problem of Contact" and "Sparing Partners" and "A United Christian Front" present an analysis of what can be done if we are not afraid to open our mouths right here on our own ground. Here is abundant encouragement for speakers who wish to help their friends "in parduus semidellum."

Where Did We Get Pictures?

The dramatic photos illustrating the Courier-Journal's series of articles "Look Out Below" have been supplied us by SFC Samuel H. Alexander who is in charge of special projects of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The pictures are either official government photos or from the Sergeant's own personal file built up over his years of special projects duty.

Coming installments of "Look Out Below" will be illustrated with combat photos taken under fire during World War II and the Korean action.

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