

# LOOK OUT BELOW!

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ant little city of fifty thousand inhabitants and to the tented area that was to be our home until "D Day" and again for a while after we returned from Normandy until we jumped into Holland. The streets and sidewalks of Newbury were narrow, the shops were small, and the soldiers were greatly amused by the signs, "Cinema," "Chemist," "Pub," "Fruiterer."

Little boys ran alongside the trucks calling out, "Any gum, chum?" "Got a penny?" The GI scarcely ever failed to toss something and usually felt worse than the child if he had nothing to give. Children of any nationality were a way of extracting from the roughest soldier whatever he has.

The local citizens seemed very friendly; they smiled and waved, and even the girls didn't seem to mind being whistled at any more than American girls did. All the Americans were overdoing the broad "a," and everybody was "old chap" or "old bean" and was "jolly well glad to be in death old England, don'tcha know?"

Merry England was really merry for the men of the 501st that first night. They were happy, and they could hardly wait to get their barracks but clean O.D.s out of their barracks bags, walk the two miles to town, look around, maybe meet some girls and see a cinema, and best of all, see what the inside of a pub was like.

They soon discovered that most of the girls were in uniform of one type or another, the pub served only warm beer, and one of the cinemas showed only westerns of the "Tom Mix" era and the other, strictly British pictures of all, most comely ancient vintage. It was different, however, they thought, and fun for a while.

The excitement of these novelties was soon to wear off and would be replaced by an uneasiness. This uneasiness was caused by the fact that just twenty miles of English Channel separated us from the Germans, and we knew that we would be crossing that Channel before many months had passed.

Before we pitched into training in earnest, we were given a few days to rest our legs and shake the salt of the ocean from our boots, and to visit London. The city of Newbury had scarcely been touched by Hitler's bombers.

But the first sight of London and the first experience of an air raid while there brought us face to face with the realism, the tragedy, and the horror of war. Here was not just a newspaper account. You could see the walls of a bombed building collapse; you could hear the quinous air-raid signal, the clang-clang of fire engines, the screaming ambulance sirens; you smelled and almost gagged on the stench of a building that had burned last week and was still sending up puffs of white smoke from drenched embers in its flooded basement.

But the impactability of the British is beyond description. Following the air raid the people came out from the shelters by the thousands, and they went about their business or their entertainment in this blacked-out city. You would have thought that air-raids were a normal and natural part of living — as indeed they had become for this amazing breed.

It wasn't long, however, before Charing Cross, Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Circus, and numerous other focal points of the second largest city in the world became as familiar to us as Times Square, Riverside Drive, or Hell's Kitchen in New York; the Mall in Washington; Canal Street in New Orleans; Market Street in San Francisco; or Main Street in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The GIs took England by storm. There were now a million American soldiers on that little island, and I suppose ten million tons of American equipment. It was said that the primary purpose of the barrage balloons over London was not just to keep German bombers from attacking at low level, but to keep England from sinking under the weight of American men and equipment.

Every American soldier had at least fifty dollars a month (in those days in England that was a great deal), and he was determined to spend it on anything that offered a little di-

version. The English were started by the wanton display of so much money for entertainment. The British serviceman quite understandably resented the advantage the American had over him when it came to getting "date. Street fights between the servicemen of the two countries were common.

Major General William Lee, Commanding General of the 101st Airborne Division, to which we were now attached, gave the regiment a talk that inaugurated the intensive training program.

This talk was the finest Christian analysis I have ever heard of the purpose of an army, of the dignity of the soldier's profession, and of the high standard of deportment and of personal integrity rightly expected of every man who had been given the opportunity of wearing his country's uniform. These were sincere words from a deeply sincere man.

To this man soldiering was not just a career — it was a vocation, a total dedication like the priesthood. He told us what lay ahead, and that sacrifice and obedience to an heroic degree would be required of us. Enlisted men and officers alike were profoundly moved, perhaps as much by the greatness of the man as by what he said.

There were no shouts or cheers after this speech, but when it was over, every man returned to his duties a better soldier. Confused minds began to see a break in the clouds of doubt and uncertainty.

A couple of months after this talk, Bill Lee, as everyone referred to the general, had a heart attack and had to go to the hospital. Sheer exhaustion and physical disability could never have kept him in bed; he had to be confined there by orders of his superiors.

I had contracted a touch of the flu at this same time and had a room directly across the hall from General Lee's room. I made bold one day to rap on his door. Obeying a pleasant, "Come in," I inquired how he was feeling. After that, each day he would tell the nurse to invite me in for a short visit.

A monk could not have more cheerfully resigned himself to his ailment than this man, who loved the title "soldier" more than "general." Bill Lee died shortly after the end of the war, but there are thousands of men to whom he is still the "old soldier." He is known as the "Father of the Airborne." There are at least three airborne generals who have become Chief of Staff of the Army, and they speak of Bill Lee in a tone of awe and in terms of the deepest respect.

Lee was replaced by a younger, more vigorous man, General Maxwell D. Taylor. Taylor was one of the most successful young generals of World War II and following the war was appointed to the very responsible position of Superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point. In 1955 he became Chief of Staff.

Less than a year before taking command of the 101st he had given real proof of the promise of his meteoric military career when he landed from a submarine and went in behind the German lines in Italy. There, under the very noses of the Nazis, he obtained from Marshal Badoglio a declaration of Italian non-belligerence.

Training in England was a real hardship for everyone. The weather from January, when we arrived there, until June was cold and drizzly. Our field problems were long and difficult. Jumping in England was extremely hazardous.

In North Carolina the heat waves thrown up by the warm sand had made parachuting fairly easy, and the sand also cushioned the shock of the landing. But the atmosphere in England was very thin, making the descent faster, and the rocky soil, numerous fences, and the omnipresent hedge-rows were added hazards that we were not accustomed to.

Besides this, we jumped with more equipment and were more heavily weighted down than ever before. The injury casualties were very high, about eight per cent, whereas they had been less than two per cent in North Carolina. (Due to new techniques and better equipment they are down to a small fraction of one per cent now.)



Paratroopers mill around what was left of a transport glider after it cracked up in landing.

On one night jump I lit in a tree and cracked a couple of ribs against the trunk. From then on night jumping has held real terror for me.

After four or five mass jumps in England it was decided to risk no further casualties, for such highly trained and specialized troops were not easy to replace.

On one of our night problems the battalion to which I had attached myself was to jump, assemble, and then work its way toward the village of Lambourne. A road block was to be set up outside the town; we were to dig in, wait for a couple of hours, then attack and take Lambourne just before dawn. After the roadblock had been set up, being very tired, I lay down in a ditch beside the road, pulled my trench coat tight around me, and went to sleep.

I don't know how long I had slept when I awoke feeling something cold and flat pressing under my chin. Fearful that it was a snake I opened my eyes almost afraid to breathe. "Chaplain," hissed Colonel Johnson, with his sharp blade against my neck, "is certain you would have been a dead duck by now."

About seven miles north of Newbury was a lovely residential district called Coldash, The Francisca Missionaries of Mary, a wonderful order of sisters, had an orphanage there. All the orphans were girls except two little boys who stuck to each other like Siamese twins.

The Catholic chaplains located in this section of England met in Saint Gabriel's Home for Children once a month, and the meetings were to be among my most pleasant recollections of England. For a couple of hours we would have a conference to discuss any problems we might be having in our units. The sisters then served a dinner that made us forget for the time being that there had



Paratroopers don't always fly to their destination. Their usual mode of travel was by stank's mare.

over been a shortage of food in Awmericlaw, land of the frrreee."

The sisters worked their own farms, however, and the healthy, rosy-cheeked orphans, many of whom were children of people killed in the bombings, were at least spared the most dreaded aspect of war — hunger and starvation. After the dinner the children would put on a little show, and they really were clever. They sang mostly American songs and always closed with a rousing "Gawd bless D-Day."

NEXT WEEK — Ready for D-Day.

## Red Paratroops Told 'Don't Pray'

A communist publication has urged young East German paratroopers to rely exclusively on their skill and equipment, and not to pray before jumping.

The official magazine of the communist sports organization compared belief in what it termed an "unknown God" with such known factors as "wind velocity, drop speed and one's own skill," and commented:

"If it should occur that we do not reach our target, then no prayer can help us."

## Vocations By Mail

Woodstock (N.C.) — A "vocation school by mail" is enrolling its first students at the Jesuit Woodstock College here.

Potential students are the 116,000 Catholic high school boys in the Middle Atlantic states. Father Charles Gallagher, S.J., who initiated the program, sees it as a spur to vocations in general even though most of the literature connected with it deals with the Society of Jesus.

"Vocation posters," designed and made at Woodstock College, are sent free to high schools.

Young men who reply to the poster's invitation receive an answer from one of Woodstock's theologians who have served as high school teachers. As long as the boy wishes, his personal correspondence is continued. The response, from the 50,000 boys in the participating schools, has been gratifying, Father Gallagher said.

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