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Normandy Notes

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WITH U. S. TROOPS IN FRANCE [By Cable]—D Day for my outfit was a long, dull 24-hour wait. We spent the whole day marooned in the middle of the English Channel, sunbathing, sleeping and watching the action miles away on the shore through binoculars. We could hear the quick roars and see the greenish-white flashes of light as Allied battleships and cruisers shelled the pillboxes and other German installations on the beach.

On D-plus-one we took off for shore. Four Messerschmitts dove down to strafe the landing craft as we headed in, but a Navy gunner drove them off with a beautiful burst of ack-ack.

The broad flat beachhead was a scene of well-organized chaos. Trucks, bulldozers and jeeps drove over the dunes in steady streams. The jeeps had the worst of it. A lot of them were stranded the minute they took off from the landing craft. All the drivers could do was to wait helplessly on the beach for the next low tide.

There were hundreds of German prisoners waiting on the beach to be taken off in LSTs and transported to England. They had been told that they would have to wade to the ships, so some of them were stripped naked and squatting gloomily on their haunches on the cold damp beach. The prisoners were almost all either older men — the solidly built, hairy types—or slender downy-faced boys, some appearing not older than 13 or 14. Their American MP guards kept the lines moving right along, occasionally jeering: "Well, so you're the master race."

There were still plenty of dogfights overhead the day that we landed. Once a Thunderbolt pilot bailed out right over us. His plane came screaming down, hit the water line and burst into flames a few feet away from the line of trucks. Out at sea there were still mine explosions.

The day before. things had been twice as hot. Pfc. Thor Youngberg of Chicago, Ill., and Pvt. William Daly of Brooklyn, N.Y., landed by sea several hours after H Hour. The German pillboxes had been put out of commission long before they hit the beach, they told me, but they were pinned down for hours by rocket guns located in an inland orchard.

I SPENT my first night in a German entrenchment along the dunes and early next morning got a lift in a jeep to the command post. All the open fields along the road were lavishly planted with tall stakes, indicating the Germans had expected Allied gliders and paratroopers to land there. We also saw plenty of signs reading "*Achtung! Minen* (Beware of the mines)," with death's-heads painted on them to emphasize the meaning.

The command post was located in a large yellow-stone farmhouse. Life in the CP looked like a fairly settled GI existence compared with what we had seen on the way up. A message center was in full swing in what had been a wine cellar. Artillery headquarters had set up its walkie-talkies in the stable. One Yank had even opened a barber shop out under the apple trees.

At headquarters I met Capt. Charles Margulies, a tall, friendly young man with a small patch of clotted blood over one eyebrow. He had come over to France with the first U.S. Army surgical group ever to land by glider in any combat zone. The other officers in the group were Maj. A. Crandall of Burlington, Vt.; Capt. O. Van Gorder of Westwood, N. J.; Capt. J. Rodda of Portland, Oreg.; Capt. S. Dworking of St. Louis, Mo., and Capt. C. Yearly of Oklahoma.

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Capt. Margulies offered to drive me to a section of the front line where there were a good many wounded who had to be evacuated as quickly as possible. When we reached the large field near the end of the road where these men were waiting, we found them in no mood for medics. They wanted to see tanks.

The firing grew louder and louder around us, and finally we all took cover in a grassy ditch by the roadside. Then came a long half-hour of lying on our stomachs. It was a very bright clear afternoon, and the feeling of heat and discomfort increased as we became more and more aware of the sun on our backs and necks and on the thick gasproof OD clothing.

When the firing eased up, we took four wounded men back with us to a hospital, located in a large and handsome manor house. The wounded were methodically laid out on stretchers in the courtyard, with paper tags giving their names and the nature of their wounds.

Many of the wounded here were paratroopers who had dropped into France the night before D Day. Most of them had fought for four days without relief; all they wanted to do now was lie in the sun, bedding down in their own exhaustion.

LATER in the afternoon I returned to the CP and made myself a comfortable berth in a hayloft. The man occupying the hay next to me was a paratroop officer from Wisconsin, a pleasant young man with steel-rimmed glasses. He'd been having a tough time since the eve of D Day.

The plane carrying the officer and the men who were going to jump with him had lost touch with its formation because of the overcast and had started heading back for England. The officer managed to jump anyway. After landing, he took some time to cut himself free from the silk. Later he came across some of the other chutes but wasn't able to locate any of his companions.

He decided to walk in an easterly direction, hoping to run into some Americans sooner or later. Instead he met up with a German. As he tells it: "We both hesitated a moment, and then I shot him in the belly. Later I ran into a lot more Germans. They started to throw hand grenades at me and I finally surrendered."

The Germans doctored his wounds and did not treat him badly. A German captain, wearing the uniform of an enlisted man, apologized for his appearance, saying he had not expected the Americans to come as soon as they did. He and his men took the paratroop officer's possessions, including his chemical-warfare equipment, invasion currency and compass, but not his watch.

Later, when American tanks arrived on the scene, the Germans gave him a gun and told him to shift for himself. Eventually he wound up in a field hospital. Among the wounded prisoners there he recognized the same Germans who had been his captors a few hours before.

ONE of the field hospitals in this part of France, among the first set up by the Americans, has already been very effectively destroyed by German bombers. The hospital was located in an old French chateau, dating back to the fifteenth century. Now it has been brought drastically up to date by a delayed-action bomb that landed in back of the main building and dug a crater 70 feet across and 40 feet deep.

When the Americans took over the chateau, they set up operating theaters in the main building and laid out the German and American wounded in the great stone courtyard out in front. They spread out an enormous Red Cross flag in the center of the courtyard, and this probably was of some help to the German bombers when they zeroed in their target.

Members of the French family that had occupied the chateau were now busy climbing over the great heaps of rubble, trying to sort out their own family effects from the various layers of GI

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litter—gas masks, musette bags, paper-back copies of Damon Runyon, life preservers. One Frenchman was trying to fit some paratrooper boots on his feet. New shoes and clothing cost thousands of *francs*, he said, and even then they could only be bought on the German-controlled black market. He asked us for news of the *Richelieu* and the other French warships that had fled from the Germans to North Africa and later had steamed to New York to be refitted. As a merchant seaman, he himself had touched New York once.

Fighting in the rapidly shifting Cherbourg deal, GIs wished they knew which side was winning it.

FROM the hospital we drove out to a small farm within sight of a town that had been under Allied fire for several days but had not surrendered. All along the route we passed signs of fighting: gliders twisted around trees, abandoned tanks, dead horses and cows stinking in the field.

When we reached the farm, we had a good look at the town through binoculars. The Americans were taking their time about shelling it; a city reduced to rubble is sometimes easier to defend and harder to capture than one that is still standing. Also there was a hospital the Americans wanted to avoid hitting if possible. Meanwhile the Navy was standing by, ready to shell the town if it couldn't be captured any other way.

Early next morning the town was captured after steady artillery fire, and by noon things were fairly well organized. In the open square, Civil Affairs officers of the U. S. Army were waiting to meet the new mayor. The old mayor had died several days before, but no one seemed quite sure whether he was a casualty of the bombardment or had passed away of natural causes.

The Civil Affairs officers and enlisted men were mainly concerned with keeping the town open and operative as a military center. There was a railway line running directly inland through the town, and this was its principal importance. But the Civil Affairs people were not issuing any proclamations; the French were to be allowed to govern their town as much as possible. So far they had been anxious to prove their loyalty to the Allies.

One old man led a very excited group of Frenchmen to the Civil Affairs committee. The Frenchmen had found an underground telephone in the post office, installed and used by the Germans to keep in touch with the coast. The telephone had been cut off, but the Frenchmen still wanted the Americans to know about it.

APART from that excitement, life went on relatively smoothly in the midst of the havoc. There were about 10 or 12 policemen still on duty, and although two-thirds of the population had fled to the country to escape the bombardment, the town's streets were not deserted.

There were French civilians lining up to have their pictures taken by Signal Corps photographers; there were GIs sprawled against the walls of buildings and lunching on K rations and cognac; there was a young paratroop lieutenant playing with the dogtags of 10 Germans he and his outfit had killed; there were scores of other paratroopers all over the place, their faces streaked with light-green dust, sweat and black paint.

Several times as we walked through the streets we heard the light singing sound that made us throw ourselves to the ground. There were quite a few fires in town, but the local fire brigade had them well in hand. As the firemen bent over the pumps, their bronze helmets flashed in the sun.

About 2100 hours I went to the message center to hear the latest news over the radio. We tuned in just at the tail end of the broadcast, however, and then the announcer said: "We now bring you Fibber McGee and Molly." We all groaned.

Outside the night was loud with the continuous crackle and roar of artillery fire. A paratrooper who had seen three days of steady action sighed: "If only I had a New York newspaper right now, I'd really know how the war was coming along."

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9th Division Cuts Peninsula

THE veteran American 9th Division from Fort Bragg, N. C., received official credit for breaking through to the west coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula and cutting off more than 25,000 Germans from the main body of enemy troops in France. The 9th Division scored this first big victory of the Normandy campaign after the drive to isolate Cherbourg had been started by the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions and the 4th Division.

The 9th, whose insignia's shown above, took most of its early training at Fort Bragg under Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, now commander of U. S. forces in the Mediterranean. Under Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, it landed in Morocco during the North African invasion, fought at Maknassy and was the first infantry division to enter Bizerte. It also fought at Troina and Randazzo in Sicily as part of the II Corps of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's U. S. Seventh Army.