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D-Day Landing in Brittany Is Revealed

Isolated French Paratroops Battled On for Two Months Waiting the Big Break

By **Andy Rooney**

Stars and Stripes Staff Writer

VANNES, Aug. 17—A French paratroop battalion dropped near this city on D-Day and its remnants fought savagely for two months to disrupt German communications and to organize the French resistance army in Brittany.

Its story can be told now that U.S. forces have broken through the German resistance to free the isolated paratroopers roving, hitting and hiding, fighting all over Brittany.

From June 6 until the day the Sherman tanks showed up in Vannes on Aug. 3 the French paratroopers armed loyal Frenchmen with Sten guns; they took up miles of railroad track, tore up cable lines and generally played havoc with German communications and transport.

At Kinds of Guns

The battalion was divided into squads, each led by one officer. The men had light machine-guns of all descriptions, Sten guns, Bren guns, tommy guns, pistols and carbines. They had mortars and bazooka guns when they landed and it wasn't long before they had captured more mortars.

Whenever possible the paratroopers avoided pitched battles with the Germans. Their assignment was not to fight, or they would have had no time for their important jobs.

Their biggest battle came June 18, more than six weeks before they hoped for help from the beachhead landing force. The paratroopers had been living near Maledroit on a large French farm. The Germans began to notice that Allied planes circled over that particular farm regularly and frequently and they soon discovered that supplies were being dropped in the fields near the farm.

The German commander assumed that the farmhouse garrison was a routine gathering of parts of the French resistance army. Under-estimating the size and strength of the force, the German commander proceeded as usual. He rounded up a large force of Georgian soldiers and ordered them to march on the farmhouse and wipe out the group there. It was 4 AM when they first attacked. They came forward singing and marching in open file, unaware that behind the farmhouse walls waited one of the world's toughest fighting units.

The paratroopers waited. Finally, with the upright, marching German soldiers only 20 yards from the muzzles of their machine guns, they opened fire. The withering burst cut the German ranks in two and the remainder retreated in disorder.

There were 120 paratroopers and about 400 French patriots in the farmhouse garrison, and when the German commander realized its strength he reinforced his attacking party until there were 3,000 German soldiers with him. The battle continued with wave after wave of German infantrymen attacking. Each time they fell back, badly beaten. At 10 o'clock the following morning the paratroopers took advantage of the confusion in the German lines to launch a counter-attack. For the loss of only two paratroopers the counter-attack further depleted the German force by almost 100 men.

That midnight, after the paratroopers had killed 500 Germans and wounded 600 more, they withdrew with the patriots and vanished into friendly Brittany where the Germans couldn't find them.

The cruel Georgian troops were offered a standard price of one million francs for every French paratroop officer they captured and 50,000 francs for each enlisted man.

Crawls Into Woods

One of the Frenchmen wounded in the Maledroit battle was hit in the throat, in the stomach and in the thigh but he managed somehow to crawl to a near-by woods. A French woman helped him with his wounds and while he lay helpless on the ground a party of German soldiers discovered him and filled his dying body with slugs from their machine pistols.

The philosophy of the Georgian troops, according to the paratroopers, was that if they were captured by the Allies the Russians would make sure they were shot as traitors; if they were abandoned by the Germans the French people would kill them; if they did not fight, the Germans would kill them.

Of the French fighters who are left, most plan to settle down in a free France after the war. But one Frenchman who spent 15 years working in a restaurant in Los Angeles plans to return to the U.S.