1 PARATROOPER

The young men of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 507th Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division who landed near the village of Graignes, Normandy in the early morning of 6 June 1944 embodied a cross-section of their society that grew up in the United States in the Great Depression of the 1930s. As had their parents, the paratroopers had experienced hard times that limited their education and job prospects. But these ordinary men had become pioneers. The idea of airborne assaults behind enemy lines was a new and challenging concept in US military science. The men had also undergone a regimen of physical training that set them apart from other uniformed personnel. Their beloved leader, James N. Gavin, the youngest general in the US military, embodied the background and aspirations of the men he commanded. The product of a hard-scrabble life, Gavin defined for his men what it meant to be a paratrooper.

Airborne

Human beings have long fancied flying or floating through the sky. In Greek mythology, Icarus tried to escape the island of Crete with wings of feathers and wax designed by his father, the master craftsman Daedalus. The hubris of Icarus led to his failure and demise, and prompted the everlasting warning about "flying too close to the sun." The genius of the Italian Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, sketched in his notebook something that looked like a parachute, a tent of linen that was thirty-six feet wide and thirty-six feet deep. Da Vinci predicted that

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with his device a man "will be able to throw himself down from any great height without sustaining any injury." Indeed, in 1887, a large crowd assembled at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco to cheer Thomas Scott Baldwin, who successfully jumped from a hot-air balloon tethered at 5,000 feet. Baldwin and his brother, Samuel, designed the parachute.[1]

Military implications quickly became associated with the concept of jumping from something in the sky and landing safely. In 1783, the Montgolfier brothers demonstrated the efficacy of hot air balloons to the delight of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. The first "test pilots" were a sheep, a duck, and a rooster. Benjamin Franklin, who was serving as the first US Minister to France, subsequently foresaw the day when "ten thousand men descending from the clouds" could do "an infinite deal of mischief before a force could be brought together to repel them." More than a century later, another American in France, Colonel William L. "Billy" Mitchell, attached some concrete plans to Franklin's vision. Mitchell, who commanded US air forces in France in 1918, recommended to General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing on 17 October 1918 that the United States could shorten the war against Germany by launching an airborne assault on the city of Metz. The troopers would then attack German forces from the rear. Major Mitchell predicted that he would soon have large enough airplanes to accomplish the mission.[2] The war ended, however, less than a month later.

US military planners did not follow up Mitchell's ideas on paratroopers or his larger belief in air power. Twelve US Marines did a demonstration jump in 1927 in Anacostia, which is part of Washington, D.C. But until 1940, the US military did not have a parachute unit. Other global powers led the way. The Soviet Union began developing parachute forces in 1929 and by 1933 had created twenty-nine parachute battalions. On 30 November 1939, at the outset of Soviet aggression against Finland known as the "Winter War," a small detachment of Soviet paratroopers dropped in northern Finland. Soviet military officials never, however, relied on airborne assaults and by 1943 had given up on the idea, judging that the dropping of paratroopers raised too many logistical challenges.[3]

Nazi Germany, led by *Oberst* (Colonel) Kurt Student, a protégé of *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring, assembled eleven parachute divisions by the end of World War II. *Oberst* Student established a parachute training school at Stendhal, west of Berlin. The paratrooper

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branch of the *Luftwaffe*, known as *Fallschirmjäger*, participated in 1940 in the invasions of Norway, Holland, and Belgium. Most notably, a German parachute infantry division successfully attacked the island of Crete in May 1941. Thereafter, German generals, upon the orders of Führer Adolf Hitler, deployed the *Fallschirmjäger* solely as ground-based infantry units. Hitler heaped praise and medals on the Nazi conquerors of Crete. The Führer apparently thought, however, that the costs of conquest were high, with casualties at 33 percent and 200 airplanes destroyed. Hitler further reasoned that parachute assaults depended on the element of surprise, which would no longer be possible during a time of general war.[4]

In one of the ironies of history, US military planners drew different lessons from the Nazi airborne assaults on European countries and the invasion of Crete. The Crete operation had been conducted entirely from the air, with parachute drops, glider-plane landings, and air-landed forces. Captain James M. Gavin, a young instructor at West Point, judged the German parachute drops, "bringing parachute troops and glider troops to the battlefield in masses," a "promising" development in military science. Gavin analyzed the German invasion orders, copies of which he obtained from the War Department.[5]

High-ranking officers agreed with Captain Gavin's assessment. In April 1940, Major William "Bill" Lee, often dubbed the "father of the US Airborne," received permission to organize a "test platoon" of paratroopers. Major Lee developed an intensive eight-week training course at Ft. Benning, Georgia based on training models for British Commandos and US Rangers. The experimental nature of the training was highlighted by the use of football helmets by troopers to protect against crash landings. In September 1940, a mass jump of Lee's platoon of approximately fifty men suitably impressed Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. Marshall authorized the expansion of the platoon into a battalion. Thereafter, as the lessons of Crete took hold, the US military created three additional parachute battalions in 1941. Captain Gavin escaped from the classroom, graduated from jump school at Ft. Benning, and took command of a new parachute battalion. Gavin also wrote Field Manual (FM) 31–30, "Tactics and Techniques of Airborne Troops."[6]

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and Nazi Germany's declaration of war against the United States four days later accelerated the development of airborne capabilities. The 82nd

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Infantry Division would be designated an airborne division in August 1942. The division had been activated a few months previously. The 82nd Division had fought with distinction as an infantry unit in France during World War I. The division had created the "AA" or "All American" shoulder patch in red, white, and blue to celebrate that it had soldiers from all forty-eight states. Sergeant Alvin C. York became the most celebrated of the division's soldiers, winning the Congressional Medal of Honor. At the conclusion of World War I, the War Department deactivated the 82nd.[7] In mid 1942, General Mathew Ridgway, who graduated from West Point in 1917, assumed command of the division. Gavin, now Colonel Gavin, brought his parachute infantry regiment, the 505th, to the 82nd in early 1943.

From the outset, those who volunteered to jump out of "perfectly good airplanes" learned they were "special" members of the US armed forces. That designation proved to be a double-edged sword for those who served as parachutists in the 82nd Airborne. Lee, Ridgway, and especially Gavin imparted their visions on what it was to be "special." The paratroopers wore their chestnut-brown, custom-designed jump boots at all times, even when wearing dress uniforms. They bloused their pants over their boots. On their overseas cap, they wore a cloth patch depicting a white parachute on a blue field. When a soldier graduated from jump school at Ft. Benning, he was awarded a unique badge of "silver parachute wings." Their combat uniforms appeared "baggy," with oversized pockets in their blouses and pants to carry what they needed when they hit the ground. Famed war correspondent Martha Gellhorn, who reported on the 82nd in Europe, felt overwhelmed in the paratroopers' presence, noting "each man wears his soiled and baggy clothing as if it had been designed for him alone and was not Army issue at all."[8] As a scholar of the 82nd observed, the men had their "totems."[9]

The special status also meant higher pay. Jump pay for paratroopers was $50 extra a month and $100 extra a month for officers. In the context of prevailing civilian and military wages, this was a king's ransom. A private in the US Army earned about $21 a month and then had $1.25 deducted to pay for laundry expenses. Paratroopers training in England in 1944 for D-Day earned more than a mid-ranking British officer. John Hinchliff, who had grown up poor in Minnesota and sadly recalled being mocked at school for wearing second-hand clothing, found the extra $50 most attractive. John W. "Jack" Dunn, a medic

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who jumped with the 82nd, rued his life of hard poverty in Milwaukee. Bob Bearden, who had become a sergeant in the Texas National Guard and earned $80 a month, thought a monthly salary of $130 would be "a lot." Bearden further dreamed that his romantic life would improve, thinking that young women "would go crazy for parachute wings."[10]

Lee, Ridgway, and Gavin wanted intelligent, athletic volunteers, described as "men of the highest order" that "never faltered or failed."[11] Gavin reasoned, an analysis that was supported by experience, that paratroopers dropped behind enemy lines inevitably would be scattered. They would fight as small units, without central command. Enlisted men would need to show initiative, think for themselves, and show an independent streak, even as they accepted military commands. In order to qualify for the paratroopers, an enlisted man was required to score high on the standardized examination, the Army General Classification Test (AGCT). Although many recruits lacked four years of high school, they often achieved test results high enough to qualify for officers' candidate school. Having enlisted personnel that had the mental capabilities of their officers helped create a unique military structure. Homer Jones, who was a platoon leader in Normandy and would achieve the rank of Lt. Colonel as a career military man, recalled that in the 82nd "the normal walls between officers and enlisted men broke down. I often finished marches carrying a mortar or machine gun."[12]

Whereas astute observers might quickly glean the native intellectual abilities of paratroopers, their first impression would be of their overwhelming physical presence. Paratroopers appeared and moved like athletes ready to compete in the Olympics. From the outset, jump training at Ft. Benning was characterized by its "sheer physical brutality." General Ridgway wanted each trooper "to be as finely trained as a champion boxer." General Gavin would have made physical training challenging for legendary champions like Joe Louis or Jesse Owens. Gavin once took his paratroopers on a night march of twenty-three miles. The men conducted field exercises for the entire day. At 9:00 p.m., the troops were granted two hours of sleep. They then hiked back to camp that night by a different route. They had covered more than fifty miles. Any man who complained or fell out of formation would no longer be a paratrooper. Such a regimen, Ridgway and Gavin agreed, produced "a special kind of animal."[13]

Recruiters judged that young men who had participated in athletics in high school or college might best be able to complete the

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training. Lt. Frank Naughton and Sgt. Hinchliff had both been boxers. Homer Poss of Illinois had competed in track and field. The Roman Catholic Chaplain, Father and Captain John Verret, played football and hockey in high school in Burlington, Vermont. Private Robert R. Miller, a medic who died at Graignes, was considered "one of the best baseball catchers ever" at Boyertown High School in Pennsylvania.[14] The 82nd Division had officers who had attained "All-American" accolades in football at various universities. Ben Schwartzwalder was a center and captain of his football team at West Virginia University. Captain Schwartzwalder coached the 507th Regiment's football team and performed splendidly in action, garnering the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart. Schwartzwalder was the head football coach at Syracuse University from 1949 to 1973. Ernie Davis, the first African-American to win the Heisman Trophy, and Jim Brown, one of the greatest professional football players ever, played for Coach Schwartzwalder.

Recruiters took a subtle approach in making their sales pitch for joining the paratroopers. The recruiters were handpicked, or, in Gavin's words, "very alert, sharp-looking guys." The recruiters would spend a day at a training base before talking to men. They would be seen at the Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) Club and at the commissary or PX. Their totems – the jump boots, the wings, the airborne patch – would create a buzz. When meeting with potential recruits they would show off their gymnastic abilities by doing a series of exercises, such as tumbles. They wanted to challenge the men and show off the "élan" of a paratrooper.[15] Reverse psychology was also applied. James P. James of Wisconsin recalled that a recruiter displayed a matchbox designed to look like a coffin and asked: "Who wants to join the paratroopers or go home in one of these?" Commanders at training bases understood that recruiters were overwhelming their trainees. Officers at Ft. Warren, near Cheyenne, Wyoming tried to talk Kurt Gabel out of becoming a paratrooper, reminding him "of the gravity of choice." Gabel, who was a German-Jewish émigré, was in the Battle of the Bulge and jumped over the Rhine River. Rene E. Rabe did basic training at Ft. Wolters in Mineral Wells, Texas. His commanding officer used scatological language, trying to warn him about the harshness of training at Ft. Benning.[16]

Jump training proved as arduous as advertised. Less than 50 percent of the recruits – officers and enlisted men – completed the training course within the designated four-week period. James Megellas, who claimed the title of "the most decorated officer in the 82nd Airborne,"

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remembered that only twenty-seven of the eighty-six officers in his class finished jump school.[17] The first week consisted of running and calisthenics, followed over the next two weeks with lessons on folding chutes and practice jumping from 250-foot towers. Instruction on hand-to-hand fighting was also included. Five-mile runs before breakfast were routine and twenty-five pushups had to be done for every mistake. Recruits were encouraged to do one-handed pushups. All movement was "double-time." Edward M. Isbell from the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina recalled that during the first days of training aching men had to help each other out of bed. Isbell added that "the drill instructors were merciless," trying "to make it so tough that men would ask for a transfer." Drill instructors also played with the minds of the recruits, alternately employing shame and praise. Men who quit had to undergo the humiliation of packing their bags in front of others. The drill instructors assured those who endured, however, that a single paratrooper was superior to five soldiers. A sign on the shed where parachutes were packed read: "Through these portals pass America's finest troops. Pack well, and jump again."[18]

During the final week of training, recruits were required to complete five jumps, including usually a night jump, in order to secure their parachute wings. Officers estimated that 98 percent of the recruits had never been in an airplane before their first jump. The initial jump might be at 1,200 feet altitude and the last at 800 feet. John Hinchliff laughingly remembered about his first jump that he felt the opening shock "and I looked up at that canopy and I said, 'God damn.'" Ed Isbell "looked up to see this beautiful white canopy of silk that meant life itself." Many troopers admitted to being nervous about their subsequent jumps, perhaps now comprehending what could go wrong. Colonel Mark J. Alexander, a battalion commander in the 82nd, witnessed a training accident, with a C-47 suddenly losing altitude and hitting and killing three men floating to earth. Ambulances normally waited on the ground ready to collect those who broke ankles and dislocated knees. The landing shock was the equivalent of jumping from a fifteen-foot-high platform. On his fourth training jump, Hinchliff landed on top of an ambulance, injuring his tailbone. Against medical advice, his buddies carried him out of the hospital so he could make his all-important fifth qualifying jump. General Gavin made over fifty jumps, suffering a fracture in his spinal cord on one of his four combat jumps. In civilian life, Gavin would suffer pain from the accumulated toll of the opening and landing shocks.[19]

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Figure 1.1 A paratrooper carries out a practice jump during World War II. The paratrooper is in excellent position – upright and having turned his body away from the airplane. His parachute is beginning to deploy. Note the bundles of equipment with parachutes underneath the airplane. Rene E. Rabe photograph.

Airborne soldiers came to perceive their profession as an indispensable duty, not a privilege or pleasure. S/Sgt. Frederic Boyle made twenty-five jumps, including two combat jumps with Poss and Rabe. He told his family he was frightened every time.[20] Bob Bearden concurred with Boyle, noting that "I never made a parachute jump that I liked." The men took sustenance, however, from the "esprit de corps" that characterized paratrooper life. Gavin reinforced this by trying "to impress upon them what outstanding individual soldiers they were." He explained that "we wanted to do everything we could to enhance their pride." Bearden found out that civilians had bought into the image of paratroopers as "supermen." When he returned home in September 1942 after jump school, citizens in Dallas, Texas immediately noticed his jump boots. As he explained, "it was this national infatuation and adoration along with fifty dollars a month jump pay that kept me and the rest of the new breed of soldier jumping."[21]

James M. Gavin

Matthew Ridgway commanded the 82nd Division during the invasion of Normandy. Brigadier General Gavin was the assistant

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commander of the division. To his credit, Ridgway, who was forty-nine years of age, jumped on D-Day and remarkably had one of the most accurate and softest landings of the more than 6,000 men in the division who jumped. He landed in a gentle cow pasture, near the target zone of Amfreville, Normandy. Ridgway had not graduated from Ft. Benning. The Normandy jump was only his fifth jump. Ridgway initially planned to arrive later on a glider plane but decided he needed to be in Normandy at the outset of the mission. Whereas Ridgway was strong and skillful, he is usually not identified with the 82nd in Normandy. Paratroopers minced no words in identifying General Gavin as their commander. Veterans would later focus on singing Gavin's praises, not Ridgway's.[22] General Gavin was in charge of the training of the three parachute infantry regiments, the 505th, 507th, and 508th, who jumped on 6 June 1944. Gavin not only put his imprint on those regiments but also defined what it meant to be a paratrooper.

James M. Gavin led a life of hardship and striving right out of a novel by Charles Dickens. Gavin was born on 22 March 1907 in Brooklyn, New York to a single mother. The pregnant Katherine Ryan had emigrated from County Clare, Ireland. Unmarried pregnant women faced shame, ridicule, and hardship in the conservative Catholic country. Sometime after his birth, Ryan placed her baby in the Angel Guard Home, an orphanage run by the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn. Martin and Mary Gavin, a couple who lived in the anthracite coal-mining region of Pennsylvania, adopted the two-year-old James. Mary Gavin was an abusive, violent alcoholic. Her husband often considered leaving her. Their adopted son was a dedicated student in grammar school, who especially loved studying history. His parents forced Gavin to leave school after completing eighth grade, insisting that he supplement the family income. The teenaged Gavin peddled newspapers, pumped gasoline, and sold shoes. He read history books at night in the local library. At the age of seventeen, he ran away from home to his birthplace, New York City.

Gavin's grim, unhappy life took a positive turn. On 1 April 1924, Gavin enlisted in the US Army. A helpful recruiter arranged for a surrogate father to sign the underaged Gavin's enlistment papers. Gavin had told the recruiter he was an orphan. The Army became Gavin's family, although Gavin dutifully sent half of his $21 monthly pay to his adoptive parents. He was initially assigned to the US military base in Panama for training and rose rapidly to the rank of corporal. His superiors recognized his ambition and intelligence, and

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encouraged him to take the entrance examination for West Point. Nighttime study helped him master the math and science subjects he had missed in high school. With his appointment to West Point in 1925, Gavin had become a "mustang," an enlisted soldier who matriculated to the military academy. Gavin graduated from West Point in 1929, finishing in the top third of his class. Gavin studied at night in the latrines, compensating for his lack of formal education. He took notes and wrote mathematical formulas on pieces of toilet paper.[23]

Over the next ten years, Gavin had routine military assignments and progressed slowly in the peacetime Army. In 1939, he was promoted to captain. Upon graduation from West Point, Gavin had married Irma M. "Peggy" Baulsir from Washington, D.C. Baulsir had experienced a prosperous, stable upbringing. The couple had one child, Barbara, born in 1933. Gavin adored his daughter, whom he called "Babe," writing 209 letters to her while in Europe. A mere five days after landing in Normandy, Gavin wrote to his daughter, reassuring her that he had been "shot at but not shot." Barbara Gavin Fauntleroy reminisced that Gavin wrote so often "because he wanted her to have the security and love he did not have in his youth."[24]

Gavin wrote only once to his wife, and that was about divorce. The marriage had broken down before World War II. Peggy Gavin did not enjoy the life of a military spouse. Gavin confessed to his diary in 1940 that he had become "sexually indifferent" to his wife.[25] The couple stayed married during the war, because it made life easier for Peggy and Barbara. But Gavin no longer thought he was married and became sexually adventurous in Europe. He often called on Valerie Porter in London, took up with Martha Gellhorn, the estranged third wife of writer Ernest Hemingway, and had a brief affair with the famed German actress Marlene Dietrich. During his command in occupied Berlin in the second half of 1945, Gavin arranged for Dietrich's mother to escape the Soviet-controlled sector of Berlin. Except perhaps for Gellhorn, Gavin was not emotionally involved with his lovers. Just before the outbreak of the Battle of the Bulge, Gavin visited Valerie Porter. His diary entry read: "Had a wonderful time. Just what I needed."[26] Gavin divorced his wife in 1947 and married Jeanne Emert Duncan of Knoxville, Tennessee in 1948. She was sixteen years younger than Gavin. Like her new husband, Jeanne Gavin brought a daughter to the marriage, and the two of them produced three more daughters. They remained married for more than four decades.

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Gavin recognized that paratrooper duty was a young man's game and seized his opportunity, although he was comparatively old, thirty-four years of age, when he completed jump school. His stature grew with his field manuals on paratrooper warfare and his innovations in training. He led his 505th regiment in airborne assaults into Sicily in July 1943 and near Salerno, Italy in September, 1943. For his service in Sicily, he received the Distinguished Service Cross for valor and a Purple Heart for the wound he suffered to his leg. By the end of 1943, he had attained the rank of brigadier general. He had risen in rank from captain to general in less than five years. When he assumed full command of the 82nd Airborne after Normandy and was promoted to major general, he became, at age thirty-seven, the youngest general to command a division since the Civil War. Tall, slim, fit, and handsome, Gavin seemed to have emerged from central casting in Hollywood. His reputation did not suffer from the worshipful reports that Martha Gellhorn, who had a wide audience, sent about him and his paratroopers in Europe. As Gellhorn gushed: "From the general on down, they are all extraordinary characters and each one's story is worth telling, for men who jump out of airplanes onto hostile territory do not have dull lives."[27]

Gavin's biographers summarized their subject by noting his commitment to a "Spartan" life, characterized by heavy manual labor, long-distance marches, and a simple diet. Above all, Gavin believed "in the virtue of physical toughness."[28] Routine training involved a daily run of four or five miles, followed by long sessions of calisthenics. Once a week, paratroopers took a twenty- to thirty-mile forced march, with the warning "if you fall out, you ship out." A restless Gavin would go for a run in the afternoons, informing an aide: "Son, let's go for a run." After a field training exercise, he would lead his paratroopers in a jog back to camp. Gavin focused on grinding down junior leaders, reasoning that weary men made mistakes and those who commanded small fighting units had to learn how to cope with the "fatigue factor." Gavin turned an especially critical eye toward his high-ranking officers. He demanded the replacement of Colonel Herbert Batcheller, the commander of the 505th Regiment, when he learned that Batcheller had skipped a training exercise so he could be with the Irish woman whom he loved. Gavin could care less that Batcheller, a married man, was unfaithful. Not participating in training with your men was, however, a mortal sin. Colonel George V. "Zip" Millett, Jr., the commander of

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the 507th Regiment, was a family friend. Millett's sin was that he was "overweight" and "not in shape" and lacked "the leadership and dedication to professional soldiering."[29] General Ridgway rejected Gavin's request that he be replaced. A few days after landing in Normandy, Millett was captured by the Germans and sat out the rest of the war as a prisoner of war (POW). Perhaps sarcastically, Gavin informed his daughter in a 21 June 1944 letter that everyone was fine, but "Zip probably likes cabbage soup and black bread."[30]

The emphasis on physical toughness fit into Gavin's straightforward perception of war in Europe. The Allied forces would be victorious, when his paratroopers killed German soldiers as quickly as possible. He once characterized paratroopers "as cold-blooded killers." In a 12 June 1944 letter from Normandy to Barbara he judged the performance of the paratroopers, most of whom were "green" to combat, as "nothing short of remarkable." He added that "I believe that the violence and savagery of their combat technique is without parallel in our military history. The Germans fear them now and give them lots of elbow room."[31] Gavin understood that dropping behind enemy lines would inevitably lead to high casualties. Just before the Normandy invasion, he recorded in his diary the observation that "it is regrettable that so many of them have to get lost, but it is a tough business, and they all figure that parachutists have nine lives."[32] Gavin tried, however, to limit the exposure of paratroopers. His writings emphasized that paratroopers were assault troops. They should be assigned specific, limited missions and be withdrawn once they fulfilled their mission. Paratroopers normally fought without air support, powerful artillery, or tanks. T/5 Eddie Page recalled that he and his colleagues believed that they would spend about a week in Normandy and then be withdrawn.[33] Indeed, the 82nd Airborne Division fulfilled its assigned missions by 13 June. But their ferocity and skill had caught the attention of high-ranking officers. Gavin's superiors, like General Omar Bradley, ordered paratroopers into action because regular infantry units often advanced too slowly. Paratrooper units, whether they be the 82nd, the 101st, or the 17th Airborne, repeatedly "passed through" heavily armed infantry units and took on the enemy. As such, the Headquarters Company that Page was a member of not only defended Graignes, but also engaged in bloody hedgerow fighting in Normandy, and then, in early July, charged up Hill 95, near the village of La Haye-du-Puits. One week had turned into thirty-three days of combat. Page's 507th regiment left Normandy

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with a staggering 61 percent casualty rate. Traditional military doctrine called for units to be withdrawn after suffering 25 percent casualties.[34]

General Gavin tried to keep his paratroopers out of the battle for La Haye-du-Puits but was overruled by General Ridgway, who thought that the "fighting spirit" of the weakened 507th "was still unimpaired."[35] Gavin had, of course, nurtured that mental and physical toughness. He had also built up their confidence. He told his paratroopers that "they were the most capable guys on earth." A squad of paratroopers was worth as much as a platoon of other soldiers. Gavin further explained that "we wanted these guys to find out there is nothing too good for them; no bed too soft, no food too good, no conditions too good for them." In turn, Gavin expected that paratroopers would accomplish all missions on the battlefield, no matter what the cost.[36] As he told his daughter on D-Day minus 1, the paratroopers were "highly idealistic, gallant, and courageous to a fault. They will take losses to do anything." Overcoming the fear and danger of jumping out of airplanes had transformed the men "in that it exacts out of participants peculiar qualities of courage."[37]

Paratroopers imbibed Gavin's military philosophy, because he was not just offering the standard motivational talk of a football coach. Gavin famously informed a junior officer: "Lieutenant, in this outfit you will jump first and eat last."[38] During training, Gavin met with enlisted men to inquire about their food, mail, and equipment, always urging paratroopers to carry extra pairs of socks. He complained to his diary when he discovered in England that his regimental commanders lived in fine homes, whereas the enlisted men lived in tent camps. As he wrote, "I don't like the mud and rain any more than anyone else, but neither do the troops. Someone is losing their sense of values, maybe their perspective."[39] Officers in the 82nd Airborne, including Gavin, always were the first out of the C-47s. Enlisted men jumped knowing that their commander was already on the ground facing the peril that awaited them. Tom Graham, an intelligence specialist, jumped from the same plane as Gavin over Normandy. Once on the ground, Graham wondered if he could move with cramps in his legs induced by nervous tension. Seeing Gavin moving inspired Graham to get on his feet. Sergeant John McNally of the 508th Regiment elaborated on Graham's experience: "Imagine the terrific morale factor of the simple, stark facts: the General jumps first! If there is a mistake in picking the drop zone, the General is the first to pay the penalty."[40]

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Gavin further inspired paratroopers by engaging in combat. Gavin shouldered an M1 Garand rifle. When he jumped into Normandy, he carried 156 rounds of ammunition, four grenades, a pistol, and a knife "in case I had to fight my way through enemy territory, which once I did."[41] Paratroopers saw their general firing his rifle at the enemy. He was acting like a lieutenant leading a platoon. Stories are legion of paratroopers challenging someone approaching their perimeter and becoming aghast when they realized they had aimed at Gavin. The general, sometimes with an aide, conducted reconnaissance on enemy positions. The general added to his legend by introducing himself as "Jim Gavin" to the sentries. Two paratroopers

Figure 1.2 Paratroopers in the 82nd Airborne often saw Major General James M. Gavin as he is presented here, walking alone, conducting reconnaissance, and with a weapon in his hand. General Gavin was the ultimate paratrooper. US Army Photograph.

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of the 505th Regiment shared the story of Gavin asking permission to jump into their foxhole in Normandy to escape the rain. The general offered a packet of coffee, which the men brewed. He also took his turn on watch from the foxhole. In the postwar years, veterans unsurprisingly toasted Gavin as the "best commander in the US Army," the "most respected" officer, and "our hero." Gavin frequented reunions, and, when he entered any room or hall, the old veterans would give him a standing ovation.[42]

To be sure, negative, anti-social behavior emerged from the aggressive nature of training. Paratroopers were brawlers and womanizers. Most paratroopers were young, single, looked great in their jump boots, and had plenty of money to spend on European women. As one historian noted, under Gavin "the 82nd had striven to be the best dressed – or at least the 'smartest' unit on any battlefield or in any barroom."[43] The upright General Ridgway once lamented to his trusted aide, General Ralph "Doc" Eaton, "Doc, our people are getting mixed up sexually with British women." Eaton responded: "Right, Matt, we're probably the only two virgins left in the 82nd."[44] Memoirs by paratroopers, like Bob Bearden and John Hinchliff, are filled with accounts of brawls. Ridgway and Gavin agreed that, especially after their feats in Normandy, paratroopers maintained that it was "their God-given right to go around punching other soldiers in the nose."[45] None of this troubled Gavin. In retirement, Gavin related that he told troopers if they needed a blanket, "kill a German and take his." If they wanted a truck, "take a German truck." Soon Gavin discovered that his men were stealing trucks from US infantry divisions. Gavin rationalized that "it was better to learn to tolerate a certain amount of misbehavior but have guys who were really capable fighters and confident and proud." If his paratroopers tore up a town, Gavin would abjure judicial punishment for the miscreants and take his men on a forced march in full-gear.[46]

Headquarters Company

The men who defended Graignes imbibed General Gavin's philosophy of being tough, confident, and proud. The paratroopers who constituted Headquarters Company of the 3rd Battalion of the 507th Regiment had largely unremarkable backgrounds. As Gavin told his daughter, paratroopers came "just from farm, home, school."[47] For the most part, the paratroopers and their families had experienced the

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hard times of the Great Depression of the 1930s. As was the case with the orphaned Gavin, their education and their career goals had been stymied by poverty and family tragedies. But, as demonstrated by their test scores, they were highly intelligent young men who craved respect and professional attainment. Becoming a paratrooper helped fulfill those ambitions. An analysis of the pre-war lives of some of the officers and enlisted men underscores the themes of their desire for standing and success and their triumph over adversity.

Young men and women in the United States emerged from the Great Depression with physical and mental disabilities. With German, Italian, and Japanese aggression and conquest running rampant, the US government began to bolster the country's military readiness by establishing conscription with the Selective Training and Service Act of 16 September 1940. Local draft boards began conscripting men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five for twelve months of service. The age group would be subsequently expanded to between eighteen and thirty-seven years, and uniformed personnel would be required to serve for the duration of the war. The history of World War II conscription revealed the deep traumas the nation had suffered in the 1930s. As President Harry S. Truman pointed out, on 19 November 1945, in his message to Congress on the health status of the nation, the draft had "forcibly" highlighted national health issues "in terms of which all of us can understand." Between 1940 and 1945, five million men, 30 percent of the total examined, were rejected as unfit for military service for physical and mental reasons. Prior to Pearl Harbor, 52.8 percent of men examined were found to be unfit. Under pressure to increase numbers, draft boards relaxed educational and physical standards. A conscript would be judged eligible for military service if he had as little as four years of grammar school. The key physical deficiencies included poor feet, defective teeth and eyes, and "musculo-skeletal" issues. Many problems could be traced back to nutritional deficiencies such as a lack of calcium and protein. Public health scientists, who examined draft records from World War I, found that there had been a noticeable decline in the health of young men in the United States.[48] Eddie Page, a life-long resident of Stamford, Connecticut, knew he would be rejected for military service because of the quality of his teeth. He sought the aid of a local dentist, Dr. Fodiman, pledging that he would pay the doctor for the dental work when he returned from the war.[49]

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By definition, paratroopers had escaped some of the ravages of the Great Depression. They had to be physically strong to endure the rigors of jump school and General Gavin's training exercises. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the 143 men from the 82nd Airborne who jumped near Graignes on D-Day had faced hard times in their early civilian years. Captain Leroy David Brummitt was second in command at Graignes. After the presumed death, on the night of 11–12 June, of the commanding officer, Major Charles D. Johnston of Knoxville, Tennessee, Brummitt assumed command of the defenders of Graignes and organized their escape from the village. Dave Brummitt (1916–2002) was born in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, a spa town known for its therapeutic mineral springs. In postwar life, he declined to tell his children much about his youth other than to suggest it was "a very unhappy time." His working-class father died when he was about eleven years of age, and he was raised with care by his paternal grandmother, Susan. Brummitt graduated from high school in 1934 and achieved a couple years of college. Unlike most paratroopers, Brummitt did not participate in organized sports. As a young man, he was passionate about the dramatic arts, working in the theater industry. He earned little money, and preached to his three children the values of thrift in the postwar years.[50]

Dave Brummitt enlisted as a private in the Army in June 1941. He was selected for officer training in April 1942. He had some college, and he undoubtedly scored high on the standardized test. Most of the thirteen officers from the 82nd and 101st at Graignes did not have college degrees. Major Johnston, who graduated from the University of Tennessee, was unusual in that respect. The army accepted for officer training enlisted men like Lowell Maxwell, Frank Naughton, and Earcle Reed, who had graduated from high school and had some college. The three lieutenants helped defend Graignes. Even attaining that high school degree could be a struggle. Brummitt's close friend in the 3rd Battalion, Lt. John W. Marr of Missouri, took six years to attain his high-school diploma. Marr had to enter the coal mines to help his rural family of nine children survive the Dust Bowl drought of the 1930s. The determined Lt. Marr graduated from high school at the age of twenty.[51]

Upon being commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, Brummitt volunteered for jump school and earned his parachute wings in August 1942. He rose to the rank of Captain in the newly formed 507th Regiment and became the 3rd Battalion's S-3 Officer in charge of operational

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planning. His family believed that their father joined the paratroopers because he had a life-long desire to be the best and to associate with the best. He also enjoyed being physically fit. In 1943, while training in Alliance, Nebraska, he met his future wife, Mary O'Connor. Captain Brummitt carried a photo of Mary in his wallet throughout the war.[52]

Captain Abraham "Bud" Sophian, Jr. (1915–1944), a medical doctor and battalion surgeon, stood out among the paratroopers at Graignes. He came from a privileged, upper-middle-class background. Sophian's parents were of Russian Jewish heritage. Sophian's father emigrated as a child with his parents from Kiev, Russia in 1890, fleeing religious persecution. Abraham Sophian, Sr. entered Cornell Medical College in New York City at the age of eighteen years and became a star medical researcher. He authored an influential study on cerebral meningitis. Dr. Sophian spent his career in Kansas City, practicing medicine and continuing his medical research. He had the financial resources to send Bud Sophian to boarding school – Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. Both President George H. W. Bush and President George W. Bush attended Phillips Academy. At the academy, Sophian played golf and football, and earned a letter in varsity wrestling. Sophian moved on to prestigious Stanford University and then Cornell Medical. At Stanford, Sophian played on the golf team. He also associated with Hollywood celebrities, including the famous star Clark Gable. Upon graduating from Cornell in June 1941, Sophian married Dorothy Murphy Keck, a nurse and a Roman Catholic. The Sophian family tried hard to assimilate into the dominant culture. Sophian's sister attended a private school sponsored by Roman Catholic nuns.

Dr. Sophian was inducted into the Army on 17 August 1942 as a 1st Lieutenant. He had hoped to start his medical residency at Mt. Sinai in Cleveland, Ohio. Instead, the Army assigned him to Camp Barkley, near Abilene, Texas, for military medical training. In the summer of 1943, Sophian volunteered for jump school. His biographers noted that he was athletic and adventurous. He may have also found the additional $100 a month in jump pay attractive. Dorothy Sophian had become pregnant and gave birth in November 1943. Captain Sophian never held his child. It was unusual for recruiters to accept a married man with a pregnant wife for jump school. But the paratroopers needed doctors.[53] At Graignes, Dr. Sophian supervised seven other paratroopers who had military medical training either with the 82nd or 101st Divisions. An eighth paratrooper, Pvt. Robert W. Britton of New Jersey,

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who was a medic, died on the first day, 6 June. Of the nine men, including Dr. Sophian, who had military medical training, only one would survive Graignes.

Lt. Francis "Frank" Naughton (1918–2015), who came from rural Illinois, not only survived Graignes but also became a career military officer, retiring with the rank of colonel. Thereafter, Naughton earned a law degree and served as a Magistrate Judge in Gwinnett County, Georgia. Naughton's career path was as remarkable as that of General Gavin. At the age of two, he lost his mother, who succumbed to tuberculosis. Two unmarried aunts raised Naughton and his brother, Tom. His father lost their farm in the 1930s. Naughton, who took up the sport of boxing, attended the University of Illinois for a semester. He considered it "paradise." He could not, however, sustain his education because of a lack of money. Thereafter, he did the classic 1930s thing, hopping on a boxcar, "riding the rails," seeing the country, and fruitlessly searching for meaningful employment. He enlisted in the Army as a private on 4 August 1941 and then volunteered for jump school. He coveted the extra $50. That money doubled when, in 1942, the Army selected the jump-qualified Naughton for officer training. He received his bronze 2nd Lieutenant bars on 28 July 1942.[54]

Dave Brummitt, Frank Naughton, and Lt. Colonel Earcle "Pip" Reed (1919–1998) were three officers at Graignes who devoted their lives to the US military in the postwar period. Like General Gavin, they had enlisted as privates and achieved high-ranking status. The Army unsurprisingly kept on combat-experienced paratroopers who had ambition, intelligence, and talent. But the relationship was symbiotic. The young officers had wanted a university education. The Army supported Gavin with an appointment to West Point. In the postwar period, the Army sent young officers to school. Naughton spent a year studying at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Brummitt finished his university education through the University of Maryland extension services, attended the War College in Carlisle, and while there achieved his M.A. degree in international relations under the auspices of George Washington University. Officers who knew misfortune and hard times and had started as privates perhaps had insight into the personal struggles of enlisted personnel.

Empathy and understanding would be required of any officer handling the irrepressible Sgt. John Joseph Hinchliff, the enlisted leader of the machine-gun teams. By his own admission, Hinchliff repeatedly

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lost and regained his sergeant's stripes. He had a fondness for brawling with men in uniform who had the misfortune not to be paratroopers. Hinchliff (1921–2020) was born in Park Rapids, Minnesota, which is near Lake Itasca, the source of the Mississippi River. His grandmother, a devout Roman Catholic, raised Hinchliff. His mother had been unmarried and, after giving birth, lived in Minneapolis and played a minimal role in Hinchliff's life. Hinchliff was subjected to bullying by older children, who mocked his second-hand clothing and his poverty. His grandmother found a solution that foreshadowed the lovable Christmas movie *The Bells of St. Mary* (1945). She found prize-fighters who could teach her grandson how to box, and he became a local hero for taking down the town's nasty boys. In the film, the good Sister Mary Benedict (Ingrid Bergman) gave the bullied young "Eddie" lessons in the art of self-defense she had gleaned from a book. Despite several near brushes with death, including at Graignes, Hinchliff emerged from World War II physically intact. He ascribed this to his habit of praying constantly, as advised by his grandmother. Hinchliff has never mentioned whether his grandmother would have approved of his wartime brawling.

Hinchliff enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard in 1937 at the age of sixteen. He lied that he was seventeen, and his grandmother signed the enlistment papers. He prized the $15 he received every three months, and he liked training at the rifle range. The Minnesota National Guard was federalized in February 1941, and Hinchliff and his unit were shipped to California for coastal defense. In June 1942, he volunteered for jump school, figuring that the extra $50 combined with his $52 in sergeant's pay would amount to a princely sum. He knew he had made the right decision when he arrived at Ft. Benning in July, noting that "we were duly impressed with the personnel in the airborne troops compared to what I had been used to." On 1 January 1943, in a civil ceremony in Georgia, he married Muriel, who was nineteen years of age and from Minnesota. His commanding officers at Ft. Benning disapproved, not wanting their paratroopers to be married or have children. Muriel Hinchliff, who in the postwar period served on the Minneapolis City Council, immediately became pregnant. To please his grandmother, the couple repeated their marriage vows before a Catholic priest near the training base in Alliance, Nebraska. Hinchliff had the joy of holding his daughter for a couple of months before shipping out to Europe.[55] In the vocabulary of World War II, Hinchliff's daughter was

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a "bye, bye, baby," a means for those about to enter harm's way to preserve the genetic code.[56]

The inseparable Rene E. Rabe (1923–1982) and Homer Poss (1925–2005) were key members of the two 81 mm mortar teams that defended Graignes. As teenagers, both men enlisted in February 1943, trained in Texas, graduated from jump school together, and then were assigned to the 507th Regiment. Poss and Rabe joined the mortar platoon, because they were strong, powerful young men who could handle a mortar. Each of the three major components of an 81 mm mortar weighed about 45 pounds. A mortar shell weighed approximately 7 pounds. Poss and Rabe fired their mortar shells at Graignes, in Normandy, at the Battle of the Bulge, and in the Rhineland area. They jumped from the same C-47 airplane into Normandy and over the Rhine River. Only enemy fire could separate them. On 28 March 1945, four days after jumping over the Rhine, Rabe's face was splattered with shell fragments from a German mortar round.[57] It may have been part of the same mortar round fragments of which lodged in Poss's head, knocking him unconscious. He woke up in a military hospital in Holland.

Like other men in the Headquarters Company, Rabe and Poss had challenging early lives. Rabe's parents, Emil J. Rabe from Hamburg, Germany and Maria Jeanne Radoux from Liège, Belgium, emigrated to the Canadian Prairies. Emil, who arrived in Canada in 1890 as a teenager, worked for a time on his Uncle William's homestead ranch in Manitoba and in a lumber camp in northern Saskatchewan before acquiring accounting/bookkeeping skills. He became a Canadian citizen in 1895 so that he could visit his parents in Hamburg and not be subjected to Germany's mandatory military conscription. In 1912, at the age of thirty-seven, he married Maria Jeanne, who was eighteen years younger than Emil. They had four children in Saskatchewan, with Rene being the youngest. The family emigrated to the United States in 1924, and built a seemingly secure lifestyle in Westchester County, New York. The family was weathering the Great Depression. Dire poverty and family collapse ensued, however, when Emil suddenly died in 1938. Maria had been a homemaker, and had no work skills for the paid labor force. Rene, a young teenager, thereafter drifted, failing to complete high school and working at jobs without futures. His application to join the Navy was rejected because he was not a US citizen. The Selective Service, however, drafted immigrants. The $50 extra a month in jump pay was a powerful incentive, for he was constantly worried about his mother's financial status and sent money

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home throughout the war.[58] Becoming a paratrooper also restored the self-purpose he had lost when his father died. He earned four promotions, rising from private to staff sergeant and the enlisted leader of the mortar platoon. The day after escaping from Graignes, he received a battlefield promotion for his ability with his 81 mm mortar.[59]

Homer Poss grew up in Lebanon, Illinois, not far from St. Louis, Missouri. He was the eldest of four boys who came in rapid succession. Tragedy struck, when the youngest child, Gordon, stepped on a nail and died in 1939 from the infection. Homer lived in a two-parent household, but his parents, albeit loving, were not vocationally successful. Patriotism infused the Poss brothers. Homer's brother, Tom, served in the Marine Corps in the South Pacific during the war and his other brother, Duane, served in the Army during the Korean War. Homer left high school, persuading his mother to sign his enlistment papers when he was seventeen. He was outraged by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He feared that the war would be over before he could participate. As he explained in

Figure 1.3 This photograph of mortar men includes Arnold Martinez and Homer Poss, who are kneeling. Standing behind are Rene Rabe (in a sweater) and Joseph Ferguson (wearing a cap). It is May 1944 in England. Rene E. Rabe photograph.

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later life, "I wanted to get my licks in, too." Poss was well-built, had an athletic body, and looked sharp in his service uniform. The women of Europe would take notice of Corporal Poss. Poss would return to the United States with ambition and drive. He would eventually become city manager and then mayor of Highland, Illinois. There are memorials in Highland to his military and civilian service.[60]

Poss and Rabe were close to Eddie Page (1922–1998), the paratrooper, along with Frank Naughton, most responsible for keeping the memory of Graignes alive and the veterans of Headquarters Company together. He hosted reunions of veterans at his Stamford home and would be recognized in 1992 as the "507th Paratrooper of the Year," only the third paratrooper to receive the accolade. He was fond of celebrating each day with the cry of "Airborne." The Page family fared well in the 1930s, until the father, Edward T. Page, Sr., an insurance salesman with Metropolitan Life, died while Eddie was in high school. Young Edward promised his father he would take care of his mother, and he did. Eddie, who did not play competitive sports, dropped out of high-school. He volunteered for the paratroopers "for the adventure and the money." While at jump school in Georgia, he met his future wife, Betty King, from Atlanta. He would write 198 letters to her during the war. When he and Betty had the time and money to travel to Europe in 1990, he told his wife: "I don't care where we go, but I have to go to Graignes."[61]

The US military during World War II practiced racial segregation. There were no African-Americans in the 82nd Airborne. Generals Ridgway and Gavin opposed racial discrimination, and acted immediately when clashes broke out in England in March 1944 between paratroopers who had just arrived on the island and African-American troops who had been stationed there. In the postwar period, Gavin would facilitate the integration of the US armed forces.[62] Black soldiers were recruited to become paratroopers and formed the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, nicknamed the "Triple Nickles." The battalion did not serve overseas but did give heroic service in the Pacific Northwest. In the winter of 1944–1945, Japanese forces launched thousands of "balloon bombs," which contained incendiary devices, toward the US West Coast. Some of the bombs started forest fires in California, Idaho, and Oregon. The "Triple Nickles," who were based in Pendleton, Oregon and Chico, California, fought the fires, and, in some cases, parachuted into burning areas.[63] That the United States practiced segregation during

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a war against racist Nazi Germany has led historians to question whether Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation" sobriquet is appropriate.

Hispanic/Latino men – Pvt. Jesus Casas (1924–1944), Pvt. Carlos J. Hurtado (1924–2008), and Pvt. Arnold J. Martinez (1921–1944) – were proud paratroopers in Headquarters Company. Their enlistment records classified them as "white," which was a racist way of saying they were not African-American. Whatever their phenotype or skin color, Casas, Hurtado, and Martinez, like other paratroopers, knew hard times. Casas, a medic who jumped with Captain Sophian, grew up in the Los Angeles region of California. His parents were born in Mexico. The entire family labored in California's agricultural fields. He did not attend high school. Like other medical personnel, Pvt. Casas died at Graignes. Hurtado was born in Texas, but his family moved to Los Angeles. When he enlisted, Hurtado was working in the kitchen of a hotel or restaurant. He had finished one year of high school. Hurtado, who enjoyed a long life, was a popular member of the company who attended reunions and returned to Graignes. He was one of the paratroopers that hid in the Rigault family barn. Veterans merrily told stories of Pvt. Hurtado's penchant for landing in trees with his parachute.[64]

Pvt. Arnold Martinez came from a remarkable extended family that first emigrated from Spain to Florida and then homesteaded in Colorado. Arnold was one of the eldest in a family of twelve children. As part of family tradition, Martinez men joined the US military. Arnold's younger brothers, Gilbert and Jim, served in Korea, and Elias served in the Coast Guard and was assigned to guard the waters off Hyannis Port when President John F. Kennedy vacationed there. During World War II, six of Arnold's cousins were fighting on various fronts. Arnold enlisted three weeks after Pearl Harbor. In December 1941, he lived in Denver, where he had moved because he did not like rural life. He became a mortar man with Headquarters Company. Though short in stature compared with veritable giants in the mortar teams, like Arthur "Rip" Granlund and William P. "Willie" Coates, Martinez had a strong frame. He jumped into Normandy from the same C-47 with his buddies, Homer Poss and Rene Rabe. Martinez did not survive Graignes. His remains rest in the American Cemetery in Normandy, near Omaha Beach. One of Arnold's cousins, Pfc. Ernest "Chili" Martinez, died later in 1944 during the Italian campaign and rests in the American Cemetery in Florence.[65]

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Native Americans also fought at Graignes. S/Sgt. Stephen E. Liberty, who was born in 1916, came from Sanders County in northwestern Montana and was listed as a "Native American" on his enlistment card. He had a grammar school education and had worked in Montana's mines. Liberty, a mortar man, survived Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, the jump over the Rhine River, and the subsequent fighting in Germany. After the war, Liberty worked again in the mining industry near Butte, Montana. Lt. Irwin J. Morales was another Native American who arrived in Graignes. Morales steered, along with his co-pilot Thomas Ahmad, a glider plane with the 101st Airborne Division on D-Day. His glider plopped into a swamp seven miles south of Carentan and twelve miles from the intended landing zone. The glider carried a jeep and two additional soldiers of the 101st. Morales, Ahmad, and two enlisted men made their way to Graignes. In postwar life, Morales attended college, sampled several occupations, and eventually settled on nine acres of land on an Indian reservation in Arizona.[66]

Patterns can be discerned in the early histories of the defenders of Graignes. The Headquarters Company did its part in upholding the 82nd Airborne Division as "All American." Company members came from all regions, with the populous industrial states of the Northeast – New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois – and California contributing the most paratroopers. Except for Captain Sophian, the paratroopers and their parents had struggled in the 1930s. Financial hardship and stunted educational growth characterized life in the United States. Only a handful of enlisted personnel had completed high school, and many had attended only grammar school. A significant number of men in Headquarters Company had also lost parents during their formative years. Pvt. Marion Hatton, Jr. of the Appalachian region of Kentucky, one of the most impoverished areas of the United States, readily fit into those categories of privation. Hatton, who became a mortar man, finished 8th grade. His widowed mother finished 2nd grade. Hatton's older sister was a waitress. Prior to enlisting, Hatton worked as an unskilled laborer on a road construction project financed by the federal government. How such experiences helped formulate decisions to volunteer for jump school cannot be precisely determined. Most men admitted that they coveted the extra $50 a month. Perhaps also they were searching for something bigger in their lives. Frank Naughton's time "riding the rails" might serve as symbol of that quest. What is certain is that the paratroopers were by definition healthy, innately

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intelligent, and generally aware they had embarked on a perilous journey. The nonagenarian John Hinchliff jocularly responded to a question of whether recruiters hinted that paratrooper duty was dangerous: "Well, they did mention we have to jump out of airplanes."[67]

Basic training and jump school had not fully prepared the paratroopers of Headquarters Company for the jump into Normandy. Hard, James Gavin-style training awaited them in Nebraska, Northern Ireland, and England. They also had to endure a slow, sickening, and uncertain voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. The training would equip them with the skill and fortitude to carry out their mission of liberation for the people of Western Europe. Life in Northern Ireland and England would also foreshadow their bonding with the villagers of Graignes.

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