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## Capture Living History Paratrooper remembers D-Day

By Carl Kelly

Part 12 of a continuing series.

**In the winter of 1943 the United States transported paratrooper Bedford Biles along with many other new soldiers across the North Atlantic Ocean to England for additional training. Biles went to a camp at Newberry.**

"We knew what was going to happen," he asserted. "We knew the invasion was coming. We called it the Big Show. We were ready for it. We were trained for it. We were physically ready because every day we would run from 5 to 10 miles, sometimes 15, before breakfast. About once a month we would go on a 20 mile hike, run 3 minutes, walk 2 minutes, run 3, walk 2. So we were physically in good shape. We were ready.

"On the 5th of June we loaded on the planes about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We took off about dusk in formations of nine planes. They had pathfinders that went first, about a half hour ahead.

"As we hit the channel it got foggy. They told us they'd saturation bombed the whole place, so we shouldn't have any problems. As we hit the coast we got a lot of enemy fire and a lot of flak. Some planes were shot down. The flak went right through the fuselage of some planes. Some men were shot in the planes. The planes began to lose altitude and position due to the fog and trying to avoid antiaircraft fire. It got to be a jumble.

"I was happy to get out of that plane. The farther we got in toward the drop zone the more I wanted to get out of that airplane. I could see the flak. I could see planes on fire. I could see what was happening. I wasn't really afraid, but I was very apprehensive. I said, 'Hey, we're going to get killed and not even get on the ground. Let me outa here.'"

Almost 7,000 paratroopers jumped over Normandy, France at 12:30 a.m. on June 6, 1944, about six hours ahead of the D-Day beachhead landings. Sgt. Bedford Biles described his jump. "I was coming down and I was looking around. I saw some trees over to my right. I came right down next to a canal in the mud. I got my chute and rolled it up. I got into the cover in the trees."

"As paratroopers we had four or five hand grenades, 250 to 300 rounds of ammunition. three days supply of K rations, gas mask, change of socks and underwear, razor, jump knife, jump rope, plus 10 pounds of C2 explosive on each leg. And we had 10 detonator caps in a little wooden box that we put next to our heart."

The invasion planners had designated three drop zones in an eight- square-mile area near Carrington, but Biles said about half of the paratroopers were scattered outside the drop zones, and many were killed or captured. Their objective was to capture the town, some bridges and locks that were located in the center of the invasion area. But, first they had to find each other.

"We had crickets. You've seen crickets in Cracker Jack boxes?" He closed his thumb and forefinger as though sounding a toy cricket. "That was how we contacted each other. We also had pass words: Lightening, Thunder, Welcome. I hit the cover and I heard a cricket. We got together, about four or five of us after an hour or so. We started working ourselves toward the locks. We began to cut telephone lines to harass the German's communications.

"I remember we got pinned down pretty bad at one point, about a dozen of us. There was one Navy man with us. He got out the map and figured out the coordinates. He called the SS Fox. Then, in came those big guns. They sounded like a freight train." Biles was amazed at how accurate the Navy artillery was.

"At the end of the first day, we had only 1200 to 1400 men that had gotten together and were fighting. The rest were scattered all over the peninsula. It took a long time for these people to get together and become a fighting unit.

"Things had not gone as we had planned, but the fact that they had not gone the way we'd planned turned out to be a blessing. The Germans didn't know. Hitler had a panzer division about 200 miles away that he could have moved in fast if he realized what was going on. But, he didn't.

"That first night we weren't attacked too much because the Germans didn't know what was going on either. They were holding their ground and we were holding our ground.

"On the second day things began to settle down. Out of chaos comes order. We began to get together and to get things going.



*Paratrooper Bedford Biles jumped over Normandy, France on D Day about 5 miles off the beach and about 6 hours before the beachhead landing. He commented that the paratroopers were badly scattered and that they didn't get organized until Day Two.*

By that time we had gotten together about 2,000 or 2,500 men in our fighting force." They captured the town, the bridges and the locks and began to move inland.

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