

It should be noted that no one in the 507th, including these troopers, had any combat experience. Nevertheless, I think it fair to say that everyone, including those of us mentioned above, who made this drop were physically and mentally ready and eager to accomplish the missions assigned. The 3rd Battalion mission called for a parachute drop near Amfreville, a short distance southwest of St. Mere Eglise where other 82nd Division units were to land.

The Army Air Corps Troop Carrier Squadron carrying 3rd Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company followed the planned flight route from England until we reached the Normandy coast where we began to encounter German anti aircraft flak. Instead of holding course, the squadron took a different heading. As jumpmaster for my plane load of troopers, I was standing in the open aircraft door searching the terrain and checking my watch for approximate elapsed flight time to the Drop Zone when the red warning light came on. I was unable to identify any familiar landmarks in spite of my long hours studying the maps, aerial photographs and sand table mock-ups. As we reached the critical, planned jump time, I noted the red warning light had not been replaced by the signal to jump. However, at that point I observed troopers in planes ahead of and around me leaving their planes and knowing our place was with the unit, I gave the "GO" command and exited the aircraft followed by my "stick" of troopers. Troopers were widely dispersed, some landing in swamp (the Germans had flooded the lowlands surrounding the canals in the area) and assembly was slow, lasting until approximately noon of D-Day.

On the ground I was unable to locate any identifiable landmarks and after daylight discovered from a French farmer that we were near the Village of Graignes, which was not to be found on my tactical map. Fortunately I had been issued an "escape kit" that included a silk map of Normandy which I examined and to my dismay discovered we had been dropped approximately 18 km from our assigned drop zone near Amfreville. To this day I have not received a credible explanation of the Troop Carrier actions, but the resulting mistake proved to be very costly to the 507th, and to the 3rd Battalion mission in particular. As assembly continued into D-Day, troopers, including Major Johnson, gravitating to Graignes finally totaled 173 officers and men from the 507th, plus 7 troopers from the 101st Airborne Division and one glider pilot. Later we added two Spanish civilians who had been forced into a German labor unit, both of whom spoke French thereby supplementing our one French-speaking 3rd Battalion soldier. Major Johnson assumed command and established an abbreviated Command Post in the local schoolhouse. As noted above, our mission required us to join our parent unit with the greatest possible speed. Otherwise the ability of the 3rd Battalion to accomplish its mission would be drastically reduced to small unit actions. With this thought uppermost in mind, I made a reconnaissance and observed what appeared to be a portion of the 101st Division attacking German forces in Carentan, approximately 8km distant, on line between us and the 82nd Division area, which of course included the 507th. Up to this time we had had no German contact in our vicinity and there did not appear to be any major German activity between the 101st Division and us.