

This is the story told me by the last paratrooper that left the plane of which Gene was a crew member. This boy has been a prisoner of the German Government since June 6, 1944 and escaped prison on April 23, 1945. He secured a German automobile which he worked his way back across Germany into France in.

About two weeks before the Invasion, we were moved to Southern England where we were restricted to close quarters. We didn't even know where we were and to this day I still don't know.

We were all preparing for the big jump--D Day. Our numbers were called out so we started out to find our plane. When we arrived at the plane Lt. Wheeler helped every paratrooper aboard as we were heavily loaded and it was almost impossible to get aboard by ourselves.

A paratrooper doesn't think much about his jump-pilot on a practice jump; but we were all interested in knowing who they were now.

I talked to Gene for quite awhile before take-off; as I was jump master and allowed to do this. I found out then what kind a man our pilot was--a man to be trusted.

We left Southern England at midnight June 6th. We flew 800 feet going over the Channel which took about 45 minutes and dropped to 600 feet as we approached the coast of France. Soon after we hit the coast we encountered our first flax. I was in the pilot compartment and Gene turned to me jokingly and said; "Harry, do you want to trade seats with me and let me jump?"

As I started back in the plane the radio operator and the radio room were hit. The radio operator was killed with this hit. About that time, 15 minutes after the first flax, Gene turned on the red light. We all stood up and attached to the jump cord that runs through the plane. A piece of flax pierced my arm cutting the ear off of the paratrooper standing behind me. I released him and sat him down in the plane so he could be taken back to England to be treated. Almost immediately after the left motor was shot completely out and Gene gave us the emergency bell to bail. I reached down, picked up the wounded paratrooper and when our time came to leave the plane, I pitched him out the door. Several hours later I ran upon this boy and treated his ear with sulpha drug.

I felt only two sensations after leaving the plane. One when my chute opened and the other when I landed in a hedge row. The plane crashed about 150 yards from where I hit and the explosion was so great it shook the ground where I was lying.

I have the greatest respect in the world for Gene and Johnny. They gave their lives so 15 paratroopers might live. 14 of us are living today.

Gene could have bailed as soon as the motor was shot out; but if he had the pull from the right motor after he had left the controls would have turned the plane over making it absolutely impossible for any of us to have got out. We were just barely 300 feet ~~with~~ the first paratrooper jumped and the plane was loosing altitude rapidly.

Gene was wearing a flying suit, no hat and had no chute on when I last saw him.

We got to Carentan although we didn't reach the drop zone. We were the lead ship and left 2 hours before anyone else. We were to locate the DZ and radio back to the following planes where to drop their men.

Gene fulfilled his mission entirely. He took us to our destination and dropped us. I wouldn't have been alive today, as would none of the other 14 if he hadn't sacrificed his life to save us. He rode his plane to glory in flames as all pilots want to do. I am sure he would have wanted it that way too.

You may not know this and I probably shouldn't tell you; but Gene was in the suicide snip of the air invasion of Europe. He wasn't only a good pilot, he was the best. The green pilots were put in the back and lots of them got sacared and unloaded their paratroopers in the Channel to be drowned. You are bound to know Gene was the best or he wouldn't have been picked for the lead ship and such a responsibility.

Two paratroopers received broken legs which were amputated by German doctors after they were captured. I was captured 18 hours after I jumped and was a German prisoner over 10 months. I escaped three times but was caught the first two times. I was put in solitary confinement three weeks each time on nothing but bread and water and that was awful to eat and drink. The second time I was in confinement I had yellow jaundice and malaria and had to be removed to a hospital.

When we got ready to leave the paratrooper said he wanted to see Jimbo when he grew up to be a man. He said he wanted to tell him that his Daddy died so that 15 paratroopers could live and that is the reason he is here today.