

## Airborne In Normandy

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**From:** Clyde Roach [clyderoach@bellsouth.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, April 14, 2006 10:27 AM  
**To:** brian@airborneinnormandy.com  
**Cc:** Steve Roach  
**Subject:** D-Day paratroopers

RE our phone conversation:

I believe there some mistakes in the records you have pertaining to D-Day and the 61<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Group.

First: I believe the serials 24 and 25 were actually reversed. We practiced many of these takeoffs prior to D-Day. Generally, all 36 aircraft of both serials are positioned on the runway, packed in tight Vs. Although; the serials are separate on paper, the formation is one. The lead ship of the rear serial is as close to the rear of the first serial as if within the same squadron. The takeoff is made in one formation.

I arrived at the aircraft an hour before departure and mingled with the troops. They were the most dedicated, brave, and hyped-up group of men I have ever seen. No aircraft took off during this time.

I distinctly remember, as copilot of serial 25, there were no aircraft in front of us. We had a takeoff time, and the whole formation sat in takeoff position waiting behind.

Last minute changes were not uncommon. I had been flying 1<sup>st</sup>. Officer in all the training previous to D-Day, and planned to be back in the formation. At the last minute, Shermer (my roommate) asked me to fly the mission as his copilot, explaining the need for two qualified 1<sup>st</sup>. Officers in the lead ship. That's why we also had extra navigators. My duties were to handle the radar, do dead recognition as backup to navigators, and give the green light when over the drop zone. Shermer had passed that responsibility to me. When the green light switch in the cockpit is activated, the crew chief illuminates a bright green light in the astrodome (a plastic bubble on top of the fuselage). The signal is relayed back through the formation by squadron leaders.

The copilot for Betts was Joe Grant (was killed later), a new and very low experienced pilot. That might have been why the serials were switched.

Second--As to dropping troops off course: The mission went as planned. We cruised at 1500 feet until reaching the coast, before descending to 400 feet. The weather, higher solid overcast, with tolerable visibility, was of no consequence. In any case, our squadron was trained to maintain formation in instrument conditions. No enemy resistance occurred until passing between the Channel Islands. No enemy resistance over the Cherbourg peninsular.

The pathfinder group (of which, I had previously been a member) was supposed to drop a specially trained stick of paratroopers on the drop zone. They were to set up a Ureka-Rebeca transmitter for us to home-in on. No signal was ever received.

A good ground radar return was received as we crossed the coast, positively identifying our position. The flight from the coast to the drop zone was smooth, short and direct. When dead-reckoning

commanded we were over the drop zone, a small break in the overcast revealed moonlight reflecting off water for an instant. I refused to give the green light. I had activated the amber light three minutes previously. And the crew chief had relayed same. Within a minute or so, another break occurred, and I could see buildings. I gave the green light.

There is no way we could have been very far from the drop zone. Months later, I was notified we missed the drop zone 4000 yards. We returned to Barkston Heath in formation and landed. There were no stragglers. Therefore; no ship could have wandered off course as far as your records perceive.

You might wonder how a man of my age might remember these details. Shortly after the war, I wrote an narrative of D-Day and sent it to Readers Digest. It was never printed. Also, there have been other presentations to refresh my memory.

Record keeping was not as precise in World War Two as it is today. Records were sometimes compiled from first drafts, and not from an after the fact investigation. Paratroopers could easily board the wrong airplane. Single troopers that landed far from the drop zone could have misread their map. On a resupply mission, D-Day +1, I had an extra man, a private, onboard to help discharge cargo from inside the cabin. The private was snatched from a non-combat ground unit. We were shot down, and he was injured. The records **do not** show that he was even on board.

Good Luck

Clyde Roach

PS----Am send picture of Barkston Heath, practice mission