

MISSIONS

MAY 13, 1943 TO NOVEMBER 24, 1944

53rd. TROOP CARRIER SQUADRON

61st. TROOP CARRIER GROUP

LT. DON KING

The Allied invasion of Sicily, codenamed Operation Husky, was a major World War II campaign, in which the Allies took Sicily from the Axis (Italy and Nazi Germany). It was a large scale amphibious and airborne operation, followed by six weeks of land combat. It launched the Italian Campaign.

Husky began on the night of July 9, 1943, and ended August 17. It was the largest amphibious operation of the war in terms of men landed on the beaches and of frontage. Strategically, Husky achieved the goals set out for it by Allied planners. The Allies drove Axis air and naval forces from the island; the Mediterranean's sea lanes were opened and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was toppled from power. It opened the way to the Allied invasion of Italy.

July 9, 1943 - -

18:00--We have been briefed on our first mission. The invasion of Europe has begun. We are the first Squadron to put American troops on European soil--our target is Sicily!

We stand around operations waiting to be taken to our planes. We are listening to the phonograph and talking. The truck comes and we leave for our planes.

19:00--We are at our stations--1st. Lt. John L. Wood as pilot and myself as co-pilot, S/Sgt. Clifford V. Meadows as engineer, and PFC. Walter E. Schryver as radio operator. We are to fly the left wing of the leading flight of our group. We start our motors and taxi to the south end of the runway for take-off. We take off and circle the field to get into formation and pick up the other groups that are to join us. When we have our formation we head out on a course of 50 degrees until we reach the coast and turn to 126 degrees. All goes well and there are hundreds of planes in our formation.

20:00—We reach our first check-point—an island off the coast of Tunis. We turn to a heading of 93 degrees and head for Malta. We have all our lights on now.

21:00—We turn out our lights and no one can smoke. We do not see Malta but know we have passed in the dark. I am doing most of the flying because it is dark and I am on the right side and can see better. We turn to 10 degrees.

22:00—We fly until we come to Sicily. All goes well and is quiet. We see many surface vessels waiting 10 miles off shore for a signal to land troops. We follow the coast of Sicily until we come to Gela and turn inland to our DZ. As we turn inland we meet a hail of machine gun fire and some anti-aircraft. It is over in minutes and we drop our troops in the DZ. We see Gela in flames and completely destroyed. Earlier in the evening a flight of P-40's went over at a high altitude and drew the Italian search lights and another flight came in low and shot them out so there are no search lights on us. B-17's came over before us to pick up radar and distract their fire. All is dark except for the flares the Italians and Germans are shooting up in their vain attempt to locate us.

23:00—We lose altitude again and head directly home—255 degrees—none of our ships are lost, but other Squadrons have lost a few. Everything goes well all the way home and everyone lands safely by 01:30. We have most of the camp out to meet us and the cooks have some coffee and donuts for us. Not much excitement for an invasion.

JULY 11, 1943—(My 24th birthday)

19:00—We are briefed and ready to be taken to our stations. We have the same crew with the exception of Sgt. Crockett as engineer and Lt. Elmore as navigator. Among the paratroopers is a Major, a Capt., and a 1st Lt. They are a rough looking bunch of boys. We are taking 1st Lt. Walter Blair along for the ride knowing that there won't be much tonight. We are to fly the right wing this time and be deputy Squadron leader.

20:00—We are in take-off position all talking and having a big time. We take off and circle the field getting into formation and picking up the other groups we are to take—we are the last Squadron in our group tonight. We start on the same course as before—our target is nearly the same spot. We are on our own tonight because they are to have things well under control—no P-40's or B-17's.

21:00—We take up a heading of 88 degrees until we reach an island half way to Malta. Our altitude is 100 feet—those following us are lower. It is a beautiful night and visibility is good.

22:00—We are nearly to Malta and have changed course to 96 degrees. All is going well and we are laughing and joking.

23:00—We can see Malta clearly tonight and circle it to the south and east and turn to 7 degrees and to Sicily. Twenty minutes from Malta I am to give the paratroopers their warning to stand up and hoop up. We still have our formation lights on although we don't need them. We also have our amber recognition light on. John says "This is just like practicing back in the U.S." He no more than gets the words out than a surface vessel which is directly below us cuts loose with a hail of machine gun fire. We know it is an Allied ship and we have our recognition lights on so we really swear at them. We are hit but not bad. Ehnot and Froom on the left wing must be hit bad but they stay in formation. Machine gun fire and anti-aircraft fire is thick on the Island of Sicily now. We are still at 100 feet but start to gain altitude because of hills on the Island. We reach the Island and find one of the paratroopers is hit but insists on jumping just the same. We fly inland 2 minutes and turn to 320 degrees. As we turn, Ehnot and Froom do a beautiful chandelle to the left and never pull out. We see them burning on the ground and John said, "Ehnot just crashed", and I said, "He did?" It didn't bother us in the least because we were so busy dodging machine gun fire. We had to leave formation and make a 360 degree turn to the left to get over a hill. We were really on our own now and all hell has broken loose. We get to our DZ. The major says, "Friend or enemy we'll kill those bastards!" and they jump from 600 feet above the ground. After they jump we push the nose down and throttles and pitch ahead to 50 inches and 2750 rpms. Whoever says a C-47 won't do 220 mph with racks on is crazy—we did

it. We are pretty badly shot up by now and are beginning to wonder. We don't see another ship.

24:00—The coast is a solid wall of machine gun fire and anti-aircraft fire. We wonder how long we can last. Lt. Elmore is hit and knocked down—he has the radio operator take off his parachute while he fumbles for sulfamilimide. He is just scratched but scared. Crockett comes running up and says our tail is badly shot up. He and Lt. Blair go to look at it. Blair says our tail wheel is shot nearly off but none of the cables are hit. A slug comes through from behind and rips into my parachute, setting it afire and spills it all over. Blair grabs the fire extinguisher but decides to use his canteen of water because the chemicals in the extinguisher are injurious to the skin. He puts it out O.K. John is flying now and we are just skimming the hills at 200 mph. We fly up every ravine we can, hunting for a way out of this wall of fire. We finally find a space between 2 concentrations of fire where we will be out of range of them...We duck up a ravine headed for the coast.

01:00—We pull up over a hill at the end of the ravine and we are met by a hail of machine gun fire from 15 or 20 ships lying just off the coast. As we reach the coast our altimeter reads 100 feet below sea level. We are still doing 200 mph barely out of the water and waving and dodging to miss ships and fire. John is yelling, "If they get me grab it quick." We are hit some more and John turns off the battery switches to prevent fire. We think if we get through this we will be the only ones to return. We have our recognition lights and shooting flares to tell them we are friendly ships but they continue to shoot. It looks like John just dipped the left wing in the water so I caution him. We are finally out of this fire and try to find our position. We think we are far enough at sea by this time to be safe. We no sooner relax than hell breaks loose again. We shoot more flares but it doesn't do any good. We are finally out of it and I notice that our ship is running rough and I know John noticed it too but neither of us mention it because there is no use to worry the rest of the crew. We pick our heading of 255 degrees and head for home—come what may we are ready now. We are surprised to see another ship pull into formation with us because we thought we would be the only ones lucky enough to get through that hail of lead. We don't know for sure where we are and our radio is shot out so we hold 255 degrees and hope and pray we make it. We know we will hit Africa somewhere but don't know where so we save one flare in case someone challenges us. We are at 1000 feet and it is cloudy. We have a drink of water and a cigarette and everytime John moves his cigarette I jump because it looks like a tracer. Every cloud reflected on the water looks like a ship and we both jump. I am doing most of the flying now because John had his share tonight.

02:00—We see the coast of Africa and by luck we hit it in the right spot. We see Sousse below and a convoy of ships in the harbor. We turn all of our lights on and shoot a flare. They don't shoot at us—thank God. We turn to 240 degrees and fly until we recognize our position. The British beacon by our field is flashing GZ so we know we are home but which is our field? We head directly at the beacon and cross a field on the way. We see the big red "M" at the end and recognize our own field. We decide to make an emergency landing because we think both of our tires are shot up. We have no more flares to shoot so we change our minds and decide to make a normal landing. I put the landing gear down and wait for the pressure to rise – it barley moves and we look at each other and

all of a sudden it jumps up and we know our landing gear is down. We stick our heads out of the windows and by the use of flashlights see that our wheels are all right but can't tell if there is air in them or not. We turn on our approach and put down flaps and John lands – a beautiful landing. We taxi to the end of the runway with our tail in the air because we don't know if we have a tailwheel or not. We finally have to sit it down and we all hang on – it is there and holds! We taxi to the parking place and shut off the motors. We sit there a minute realizing we are the luckiest men in the world. We finally get out to look at the damage. It is just like a sieve and has 4 holes big enough to stick your head in. Lt. Elmore finds out it was a piece of the radio that hit him. We find that our Squadron lost only one ship – Ehnnot and Froom in ship 918. Several are shot up as bad and some didn't get hit at all. The old ground really feels good. We now have 2 white parachutes to paint on our ship. It is hard to tell when our ship will be ready to go again. I wish we could go back right away. We have the Navy to thank for a most enjoyable evening - - I hope I can do as much for them some time.

July 28, 1943

05:00 - - Our first Sgt. Awakens us at this unearthly hour and tells us we take off at 07:15. We get up, eat breakfast, and get to the operations hut by 07:00. We find out it is to be a freight run to Palermo, Sicily on the north coast. We have to go to field "D", which is south-east of Kairouan to load up.

07:30 - - We take off and are at field "D" in 40 minutes. We get loaded by 09:00 In our ship and we have our same crew and Lt. Wrang as navigator. We are to lead the 4th flight. We have a jeep and trailer, 17 stretchers, 5 life rafts, and our emergency radio. Our VHF and IFF is still not working. We take off at 09:15 and head for the coast.

10:00 - - We are well on our way. The weather is bad and visibility is poor. We are loaded pretty well so we take it slow. We see Pantallaria on our right and know we are still on course. We have to fly a souse formation because of rough air. We are loosing 2000 feet a minute and then going up 2000 feet a minute. It is really a job to stay on course. We have to stay fairly close together in order to see each other but not so close we are thrown together by the rough air.

11:00 - - We sight a few ships below us and do not fly over them because we know they will shoot at us. All is going well and we see Sicily and are still on course. We turn to 120 degrees which we find out later is wrong. We fly for ½ hour and our navigator says we are over enemy territory, but the formation continues on. Finally they turn back and head up the coast at about 200 degrees. It is really a relief to see friendly territory. We sight Palermo and the field. It si surrounded by mountains on all sides. The runaway is only 2200 feet long so we circle th e field and come in slow and short using all of the

runaway. We get stopped but none too soon. We get unloaded and look around the place. No signs of bombs but it has been strafed. German and Italian planes litter the field and surrounding territory. The people are friendly and say they wish we had gotten there a year ago. We eat a can of "C" rations and get ready for the return trip.

13:00 - - We take off and head back. The weather is still bad and rough. The visibility isn't any better. We are moving right along now that we are empty. Everything goes well and we don't see a ship, and airplane, or anything on the way back.

14:00 - - We see the coast of Africa and fly until we hit our assigned

From there we head for the field and are on the ground by 15:00. All in all it was an uneventful trip, but there will be more. It isn't much fun to duck lead anyway. Sicily is beautiful in the spot where we landed - - I'd like to be stationed there.

August 1, 1943

06:30 - - We are rudely interrupted and told that we are going to Sicily in an hour. We get up, dress, and eat breakfast. No one seems to know what we are to do. We meet at operations for instructions and find out we are to move an anti-aircraft outfit from Gela, Sicily to Palermo, Sicily. Lt. Wood and I are to lead the second flight. We have Lt. Wrang as navigator otherwise it is the same crew. Take off time is set for 07:30 so we check out our maps and rations and take a truck to our ship.

07:30 - - Wood isn't feeling well so I do the flying. We are only taking six ships and the 15th Squadron is taking six. We take off with Major Betts leading the Squadron. We head right out on 60 degrees. It is a beautiful morning and the weather is good, the air is smooth. We see a convoy of ships below us and fly around them. We are at 1500 feet and unescorted so it doesn't pay to fly over them. At 08:20 we sight Pantalaria and change our heading to 50 degrees. We haven't seen a thing except the convoy since we left and haven't hit any weather. At 09:00 we run into clouds and have to let down under them - - no rough weather. We see the coast of Sicily now and are right on course. As we come over the coast the Major signals for a change in formation so we go into echelon to the right. We circle the field and it is a good big field and load up. We have 2000 pounds of ammunition, 2 anti-aircraft guns, some big boxes, and 8 men with their equipment. We wait around until they tell us we have everything.

11:00 - - We take off and Wood is flying now and I'm watching the map. We fly about 340 degrees and climb all the way because there are mountains under us that seem to get higher as we go along. We hold our course well and are over Palermo at 11:40. We have to circle the field losing altitude. As we do, we can see that the city has been bombed since we were here last. We are in echelon and peel off to land. This short runway is going to bother us because we have a load. We turn on our approach and slow down to 90 mph and Wood

asks for full flaps and we stall along at 85 mph. Just as we go over the edge of the runway, he gives it the throttle and we ease on down without a bump. We tai over to the side of the field and unload our ship. It is 11:45so we decide to eat our "K" rations. The Major pulls out a gallon can of peaches that he got ahold of somewhere and we have a good meal after all. The doctor in the same outfit comes running out and asks us if we will haul patients back to Tunis. We already have orders to report to Colonel Meyer at Pont de Olivo for further orders.

12:30 - - We take off empty and head out on 120 degrees for Pont de Olivo. We see German planes smoking on the ground where they had been shot down last night. Wood is flying and everything is alright. At 13:00 we see Pont de Olivo and go into right echelon and land. The Colonel says to fly to a P-40 base south of there and ask if they want to move. He says if they aren't ready we are to spend the night there and go for a swim and move them tomorrow. WE take off at 13:45 and follow the coast until we reach the field. At 14:00 we get there and land. We find out they aren't going to be ready for a few days.

14:30 - - Major Betts calls the Colonel and asks if we should return to Palermo and pick up the patients. The Colonel says the 15th are still there and they can bring them. We are to go on home instead of stay over and go for a swim. There may be another job in the morning back at home. We can't find Woolcott - - Cummin's co-pilot - - who has taken off to the hill looking for souvenirs. We decide to leave without him because h e can ride back with the 15th and it will teach him a lesson.

16:30 - - We take off and head for home. I am still flying while Wood sleeps. We are at 1500 feet and flying 150 degrees. We see a few ships and fly around them. We also see some other airplanes but they are ours so everything is alright. I think everyone else is asleep and I'm getting sleepy myself so I open the window wide and the wind keeps me awake. I fly along watching the water and can see fish swimming and leaping out of the water. WE reach Pantallara again at 17:20 and turn to 135 degrees. Everyone is still asleep and it's peaceful and quiet. At 17:50 we see the coast of Cape Bon and fly along it and reach oru channel and turn in. it's a little rough over the land now and everyone wakes up. We see our field and go into right echelon to land. We circle the field and peel off for our landing. There is a strong cross wind and it's kind of hard to land but I don't bounce this one. We taxi out to our parking place and return to our tents. Mission completed at 18:15. No excitement on this one again but it was a nice trip. I see the boys have a ball game going so we watch them for awhile and go eat.

August 5, 1943

06:00 - - Lt. Saltmarsh comes running into our tent and says we have a mission and take off will be at 07:30. He says to prepare to stay overnight. WE have eaten and are in the operations hut for briefing. We are to go to Pantallara and move a Spitfire outfit to Licata, Sicily.

07:30 - - Take off time and Lt. Wood is in Cairo, Egypt, so Lt. Edgar D. Lanning and myself are to take our ship. We have our same crew but no navigator. We fly the right wing of the leading flight. WE take off and head for Pantallara. At 08:00 we sight the island and at 08:20 we are on the ground. It is a nice field and the Germans and Italians left us some nice bomb-proof hangers dug back in a mountain of rock. They are very nicely built and sturdy. We load up and have a jeep and eight men and their equipment to move.

10:00 - - We are loaded and ready for takeoff. We takeoff and head for Licata, Sicily. At 10:45 we see Sicily and at 11:00 are on the ground.

11:30 We unload this outfit and load up a P-40 outfit and are to move them up to Termini on the north coast.

13:00 - - We are loaded and ready for take off. We have a load of rations and some men. We head for Termini and are there by 132:45. We land and start to unload. It takes quite awhile to unload because they have only one truck and they don't want us to put it on the ground. We are unloaded by 16:30. We decide to stay overnight there. We eat with this outfit and have a pretty good meal. After supper we go down to the beach and swim. It is only about 100 yards from the runway. We finish swimming and start back when F/O Young sees a watermelon patch, so we eat melons.

20:00 - - We get back to the plane and start to fix our beds and get ready for bed. We carry litters because we never know when we will be carrying patients. We sleep on them out under the ships. About 04:00 a train whistle blows and we think it is the air raid siren. We jump up and see it's a train, sigh, and lay back down.

August 6, 1943

07:00 - - We are up and have breakfast with the pursuit Squadron. We are to take off and return to Pont de Olivo on the Southern coast for further orders.

08:30 - - Take off time and in 45 minutes we are at Pont de Olive. The Major says we are to take a Captain to Siracusa and wait for him and bring him back. The rest of the Squadron is to return to Kairouan.

10:00 - - We are ready for take off and at 10:30 are at Siracusa on the east coast. The Captain asks to go to town with him and look around. You really can see there has been a war here recently. Italian soldiers are still in uniform and have their arms but are used as civilian police - - they don't want to fight anymore. We wait around town while the Captain conducts his business. This town is the same as the rest - - blown to hell and people in the street begging. We see the Captain and tell him we are returning to the airport and will wait for him there. We have a few rations on our ship so we decide to eat. We wait until 16:30 for the Captain to return.

17:00 - - We take off and return to Pont de Olivo and report to Major Meyer for further orders. He says to spend the night there and pick up a load of patients at Licata in the morning and take them to Mateur back on the African Coast.

18:30 - - WE eat with the 48th Squadron of the 316th Group which is stationed there. I run into Lt. Beal who was my instructor back at Austin, Texas. We have a long talk. Lt. Lanning runs into some of his old classmates.

20:00 - - We decide to go to bed and rig up our beds the same way. The night passes quickly.

August 7, 1943

07:00 - - We get up and eat and tell the Major that we are leaving for Licata.

08:00 - - We are at Licata. They start bringing in the patients - 2 are able to walk, but the rest aren't. We only have 8 all together.

10:00 - - After a lot of waiting we are ready for the trip to Mateur. We pick up a pursuit pilot before we leave, who wants to go to Tunis.

10:30 - - We have no maps but we take off in the general direction of Africa. We pick 265 degrees. We sight Pantallara so we know we are on course. At 11:30 we sight Cape Bon. We see Tunis and knew where we are. We reach Mateur and land. They unload our patients while we go to the Red Cross tent and get lemonade and sandwiches. White women - - first we have seen in some time. We talk with them until our ship is unloaded.

12:30 - - We take off for Tunis and are there in 30 minutes. We drop our passengers and head for home. We still have no maps so we take up a heading of 180 degrees. We keep flying and find our field by 13:45. We buzz the field and see there isn't a plane around. The rest of the boys are on another mission. We land and get out and head for the mess hall to eat. We just get there and the rest of the Squadron returns. They moved a B-17 outfit to Mateur. Guess there aren't many more enemy aircraft in Sicily so it was another quiet trip.

August 8, 1943

11:30 - - WE are eating dinner and Lt. Shermer comes in and tells us we are to take off at 12:00 for Tunis to move an Ordinance outfit to Pont de Olivo, Sicily. We finish eating in a hurry and get to our ships. Lt. Wood is still in Cairo, Egypt, so Lt. Lanning and myself will fly our ship. WE are to fly on the right wing of the first flight.

12:00 - - We take off and circle the field once to get in formation and gain altitude and then head for Tunis. It is about an hour to Tunis.

13:00 - - We see Tunis and go to right echelon for the landing. We no more than get on the ground than they are loading us. By 13:30 We are loaded and ready for take off. We have a jeep, 1000 pounds of freight, 4 bags of mail, and 2 passengers. We take off and reach the coast and head out on a 65 degree heading until we see Pantailara. We fly around it to the south and east and turn to 35 degrees.

14:30 - - We leave Pantallara behind and are on our way to sicily. We see a convoy headed toward Africa and fly around it. WE sight Sicily and come in over Gela and then head for Pont de Olivo. We go into right echelon for the landing. We are on the ground by 15:16.

15:30 - - We are nearly unloaded and Lt. Shermer says we are to return empty. We are ready for take off again by 16:00. We take off and head back to Gela and toward Pantallara. We sight the same convoy, this time and fly a little too close but they don't fire, thank God.

16:30 - - we see Pantallara and fly around it the same way again. We now head out for the African coast. We sight Cape Bon in about 45 minutes and fly until we hit Sousse - - our place to enter.

17:30 - - We are over land and headed for our field at Kairouan. We reach it and go into right echelon for landing. We are on the ground by 18:00. This was the quickest trip we have ever made because the Red Cross brought us ice cream for supper and we don't want to miss it. We are each to get a pint so we hurry to make sure we get ours. First we have had since we left the States. Another quite Mission.

This was the last diary entry by Lt King detailing the missions flown during the operation (Husky)

September 13, 1943 - - - Salerno

14:40 - - News comes that General Clark's 5th Army needs reinforcements and we are to get them there as soon as possible. Lt. Shermer sets up the schedule and sets take off for 19:00. We are to go to Somiso from our station here in Licata and pick up the 504th Battalion of the 82nd Airborne Division.

18:00 - - We have eaten and have our maps, escape kits, etc. We are at our stations at 18:30. In our ship is Lt. Wood, myself, Lt. Carig, Sgt. Slagowski, and Sgt. Miranda. We are to lead the second flight and fly the right element in a V of V's

19:00 - - We take off and head directly for Comiso on the southeast tip of Sicily. By 19:30 we see the field and go into right echelon for landing. By 19:45 we are on the ground and parked in a line to load our troops. The whole mission is mixed up and no one knows where we are to go or when. We sit around for awhile and finally the Colonel says we will go to the briefing.

22:00 - - Our briefing is out in the field with a map of Italy posted on a plane and the lights of a jeep help a little. We are to go to a small town south of Naples where the 5th Army is in trouble. The Colonel says the "DZ" will be marked with a row of white Lights in the form of a "T". He says there will also be radar. In case something is wrong and the "DZ" isn't lit there is a road and river junction that can easily be seen from the air and we will use that. He says the Navy is off the coast a few miles and don't know we are coming so to be on the look out for them. He also says he doesn't think we will run into any enemy fighters. WE know where the "DZ" is and how to get there, but that's about all, so the briefing is over and we don't know what we're getting into.

23:00 - - Take off is set for 23:15 so we taxi into position and wait our turn. WE have a Captain and about 17 men on our ship besides our crew. WE take off and head out on a heading of 40 degrees towards Catania. It is a beautiful night with a bright moon and it makes formation flying easy. We hardly need our lights so we turn off all but our formation lights and recognition light. At 23:34 we are at Catania and turn to 27 degrees and hold it until we come to the tip of Sicily which is midnight. We can see Mt. Etna towering high above us and a few smaller mountains below us.

24:00 - - We turn to 37 degrees and fly until we see the coast of Italy at 00:12. All is going well and everyone is in formation, but we are coming to some clouds so we climb to 1500 feet. We turn to 5 degrees and follow the coast for 27 minutes and still no enemy action but we see several lights in the mountains along the coast. We passed over a couple boats but I guess they saw our recognition lights this time and give us not a bit of trouble. We are

getting a little nervous now because we are over enemy territory and we know what can happen. At 00:39 we turn to 324 degrees and fly along the coast until 00:55 - - all is still well and it is cloudier but we can still see alright. We turn to 308 degrees and fly until 01:12 and hit the coast. We turn to 20 degrees and fly inland for 5 minutes. Just as we cross the coast line we give them the red light which means we are 4 minutes from the "DZ" and it isn't lit up at all, but all of a sudden a bunch of flares go up in shape of a T so we give the green light and out they go at 01:17. We dropped them from 800 feet at 90 mph so we push the nose down to gain speed. Everyone is still in formation and still no enemy action. We head on for one minute before turning to give the ones behind us a chance to stay with us. Seeing those chutes go out at night is really beautiful. We head toward the coast and climb to 8000 feet because there is another group coming in under us. We fly the same course back and now more excitement than coming over. We are back at Licata and on the ground by 03:30. We head for Intelligence and tell them how it went and what we saw and then to the mess hall for coffee and donuts. This was a quite mission again but it could have been disasterous. We have another tomorrow night, but will have to miss it because our ship is out with an oil leak. First one we have missed. Guess I'll give up writing accounts of our missions until something really big comes off. These are getting to be just routine flights. Guess "Jerry" is just about through there.

The Normandy Landings were the first operations of the Allied invasion of Normandy, also known as Operation Neptune and Operation Overlord, during World War II. The landings commenced on Tuesday, 6 June 1944 (D-Day), beginning at 6:30 British Double Summer Time (UTC+2). In planning, D-Day was the term used for the day of actual landing, which was dependent on final approval.

The assault was conducted in two phases: an air assault landing of American, British and Canadian airborne troops shortly after midnight, and an amphibious landing of Allied infantry and armoured divisions on the coast of France commencing at 6:30. There were also subsidiary 'attacks' mounted under the codenames Operation Glimmer and Operation Taxable to distract the German forces from the real landing areas.[3]

The operation was the largest single-day amphibious invasion of all time, with 160,000[4] troops landing on 6 June 1944. 195,700[5] Allied naval and merchant navy personnel in over 5,000[4] ships were involved. The invasion required the transport of soldiers and materiel from the United Kingdom by troop-laden aircraft and ships, the assault landings, air support, naval interdiction of the English Channel and naval fire-support. The landings took place along a 50-mile (80 km) stretch of the Normandy coast divided into five sectors: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword.

June 5, 1944

It has been nearly a year since I have written in this book. We have done a lot since then and come a long way. We moved to England to take part in the invasion of the mainland from the west. We had our briefing Sunday, June 3, and are just waiting for orders to start. This is going to be the real thing. We are to fly a 72 ship formation on this one and be next to the last group over the "DZ". There will be well over 1000 transports alone with 18 paratroopers a piece and that many paratroopers can handle the whole German Army! We are to take off at 23:58 and drop at 02:32 and return. We just sit around and wait until the rank decides the rest of the plans. They must be expecting gas because they make us wear impregnated clothing which makes us look more like infantry than Air Corp. It is 20:00 and we are getting into our oldthes, laggings, G.I. shoes, and long underwear. Everyone is laughing and having a big time.

21:00 - - We are at our final briefing and it is just routine - - weather, opposition, communications, operating procedure, etc.

22:00 - - Briefing is over and we check our flimsies, maps, escape kits, and the Major gives us a little pep talk.

22:30 - - We are at the ship and my crew is ready - - myself as pilot, Lt. James Timmins as co-pilot, T/Sgt. Robert Decker as engineer, and S/Sgt. Paul Stone as radio operator. I am still flying the same ship I flew across - -832. I talked to the jump master who is a 2nd. Lt., and we get things coordinated for action in case of emergency and just talk about things in general.

23:00 - - We are sitting in the ship checking equipment and making last minute arrangements. We start engines at 23:21 and taxi out at 23:30. Everything is going swell and we are all on the runway for a formation take off. I am flying the right wing of the 2nd element which is a good place. We are scheduled to take off at 23:58, so we have a little time to kill. We just sit and wait. The time comes and we're off!

24:00 - - We are in formation and climbing. We are back over the field at 00:09 and head out on course of 184 degrees. We pass each check point on time. The weather is clear and a big moon is shining so it is light as day. We continue on course until we reach a flashing beacon and turn to 237 degrees and continue on until we hit the Bristol channel. From there we turn to 105 degrees until we hit the Island of Wright. Here we turn off our navigation lights and our formation lights. We turn to 237 degrees and fly for 27 minutes. There are several boats along the way for checkpoints and other formations are returning. We are right on course and on time and still in formation. We are over the Channel now and anything can happen. Beautiful night and things are going swell. We are at 200 feet above the water and I think that is too high. 02:00 - - We are at the Channel Islands where we are to turn into the Cherbourg Penninsula. There is some fire from both Islands but we are out of range of both - - I hope. We give the 20 minute warning to the jump master and he has his man stand up and check equipment. Still not much fire. We reach the coast and think to ourselves that here is where we catch it. Nothing happens. So this is "Festung Europa". The fighters and bombers have really cleaned this place out. We

cross the coast and give the red light - 4 minutes out of the "DZ" and still no fire. They throw up a little just out of the "DZ" but not enough to hurt although it only takes one. We cross the coast again but no fire. There are a few fires burning on the ground but no evidence of activity. We head for the Island off the coast and run smack into the navy. They must have been told to hold their fire this time because they don't fire or even challenge us. We are making pretty good time now and still in formation. They take a few pot shots at us from the coast but no harm is done.

03:00 - - Right on course and headed for home We have our lights back on which makes it easier. Looks like a little clouds and rain so we move in close. It rains but you can see through it if you are close enough and we are. WE come out of it alright and still in formation. We are at 3000 feet and the moon is really bright here. All we have now is to follow the light line home. Just a regular flight from here on in. WE land at 05:15 and still in formation. We check the ship and find one hole in the tail. I think the boys done a fine job tonight. Have another mission this afternoon so will continue from there.

Operation Market Garden (September 17–25, 1944) was an Allied military operation, fought in the Netherlands and Germany in World War II. It was the largest airborne operation of all time.[nb 3]

It made large-scale use of airborne forces whose tactical objectives were to secure a series of bridges over the main rivers of the German-occupied Netherlands and allow a rapid advance by armoured units into northern Germany. The plan required the seizure of bridges across the Maas (Meuse River) and two arms of the Rhine (the Waal and the Lower Rhine) as well as several smaller canals and tributaries. Crossing the Lower Rhine would allow the Allies to outflank the Siegfried Line and encircle of the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland.

Initially the operation was successful and several bridges between Eindhoven and Nijmegen were captured. However the ground force's advance was delayed by the demolition of a bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal at Son, delaying the capture of the main road bridge over the Meuse until September 20th. At Arnhem the British 1st Airborne Division encountered far stronger resistance than anticipated. In the ensuing battle only a small force managed to hold one end of the the Arnhem road bridge and after the ground forces failed to relieve them they were overrun on the 21st. The rest of the division, trapped in a small pocket west of the bridge, had to be evacuated on the 25th. The Allies failed to cross the Rhine, which remained a barrier to their advance until the offensives at Remagen, Oppenheim, Rees and Wesel in March 1945.

A tragic and unforeseen consequence of the operation's failure was the Hongerwinter (Hungerwinter). During the battle Dutch railway workers went on strike in order to aid the Allied assault. In retribution Germany forbade food transportation and in the following months thousands of Dutch citizens starved to death.

September 16, 1944-----

It has been a long time since we have had a drop in enemy territory. We have made several freight missions and evacuation missions to France and Belgium but not over enemy territory so I haven't written about them although they were interesting.

09:30 - - We are at the briefing at Group headquarters and from the map it shows our course will take us 100 miles into Holland and all over enemy territory. Could be very rough. We are to have plenty of fighters and fighter bombers and they are to lead us in and shoot up anything that moves. We are to be the 27 serial of 36 ships to a serial so it must be quite an operation. I think by the time we get there, there will be little or no ground fire. We are to take off at 11:50 and drop at 14:06.

11:00 - - WE are at the ships because stations are at 11:00. I have 2 British 1st. Lts. And 18 men. For bundles I have just 1 motor-cycle. In my crew today is myself as pilot, 2nd Lt. James Timmins as co-pilot. T/Sgt. Rober Decker as crew chief and S/Sgt. Paul Stone as radio operator. I have no navigator because I am flying the right wing of left flight in the second half of the Squadron. The British are loading up and have plenty of equipment. They seem like a swell bunch of men.

11:30 - - We are starting our engines and taxiing to take off position for a 11:50 take off.

12:00 - - We are in the air and assembled into formation. WE come back over the field at 12:06 and head out on course. We are to go to our Wing Departure point at March and from there to Attleborough on the English coast. We cross the English coast at 13:53 and head for a boat in the middle of the channel. Our time is right and so is our course. At the boat I let Timmins fly and get my flack suit and helmet on and the rest of the crew does the same. I take over while Timmins gets his. I have lost all track of time and course but Timmins knows where we are. We see the Dutch coast and fighters right down on the deck hunting for anything that moves. As we cross the coast we see that the Germans have flooded the entire area. As we continue on still in perfect formation and still expecting anything we see boats burning which means the fighters have knocked out the flack barges. Our altitude is just under 1300 feet. We see two Horsa gliders down but no one around them. Gliders will never be successful or their up keep. Here it is - - some one cuts loose on the ground with something and I can see the black bursts as flack explodes above us. We are so low that I can hear the guns go off. They are right under us but don't hit us. They hit the outfit ahead of us but no one goes down. Now the fighters go down to silence it and that is the end of that one. Those fighters are alright. We continue on and here is the red light meaning we are 4 minutes out of the "DZ". We begin to lose altitude so we can drop at 680 feet. We start our slow down to drop at 110 MPH or less. I see the "DZ" now. It is covered with gliders and parachutes. It has a blue smoke signal on it so we know we are right. As we come over the "DZ" I drop our motorcycle and give the paratroopers the green light and they jump. We are at 700 feet and doing 110 MPH and still slowing down. We get down to 90 MPH before they they all get out. When they are gone we pour the coal to it and make a wide sweep to the left and head home on the same course as we came in on. Not a shot fired over the "DZ" and we gave them a perfect drop. We still have 100 miles to go over enemy territory so we go out a little faster than we came in. I'm always glad to get out in a hurry. WE came back to the place where they shot at us and it is on fire so we know there is no danger there anymore. WE continue on and see the coast ahead of us and as we cross it we take off our flack suits and helmets and open a box of "K" rations and breathe easier. We see several gliders down in the water but the men have been picked up by the air-sea rescue boats. We see 3 gliders in the water with men on the wings so we leave the formation and go down to see if they are alright. We make a pass at 200 feet above them and look it over again. We drop them a raft and start out to catch the rest of the formation. We cross the English coast again in the right place trying to catch our formation. We know we will be home in a couple hours. We catch the formation just as they peel off to land. We come in and land and realize we were pretty lucky. Tomorrow we are supposed to tow gliders in.

September 17, 1944

10:00 - - Another briefing and this time we are to go into Holland to a spot southeast of Nijmegen which is nearly on the German border. We are to tow one loaded glider. Our route is the same as yesterday up to the IP and from there it is approximately 100 degrees for 40 minutes. Shouldn't be too rough. We are to have fighter cover again.

11:00 - - We are at our stations and checking our glider. F/O Nickerson is flying the glider and it has a jeep and 5 men in it. We check our course and get ready to take off by 11:30. I have the same crew today except my crew chief who let his assistant go today. His name is S/Sgt. Piecush.

11:30 - - We start our take off and climb straight ahead for 12 minutes and head back to the field. As we come back over the field we are all in formation. WE are flying in flights of 4 ships in echelon to the right. WE are in Lt. Ted Simons flight. WE climb to 1500 feet and head out for March - - our Wing departure point. The weather isn't too good but we can make it alright. From March we go to Attleborough, our Command departure point on the coast of southern England.

13:00 - - We crossed the coast of England at 12:56 still in formation and everything is alright. WE head for the boat in the Channel which assures us we are still on course. WE make land fall at the same place as we did yesterday. From here we head for our IP which isn't far from Eindhoven. Things are still going alright. I don't see any fighters yet though. Here it comes - - big black puffs and breaking right in the middle of our formation. You can really hear it and smell it as it goes through our plane. I guess this is where things get rough. We are out of it again but still no fighters. No one is hit bad and we are still in formation. That only lasted about 10 minutes. I don't see how they can keep on missing though - - we are only at 1500 feet and doing 120 mph with gliders so we don't dodge. Here is the IP and we turn into the "DZ". Things are quite again. We have about 40 miles to go yet thought. I see the "DZ" ahead with red smoke from signal pots on it. I give the glider his green signal which means we will be there in one minute and he can cut loose when he gets ready. Here it comes again - - small arms .50 caliber, and anything else "Jerry" has. There goes our glider - - hope he makes it. We are turning out of the "DZ" land and I see one ship go down and 4 chutes come out. It is Lt. McClintock from Fresno, Cal. His landing is right where the fire is coming from. They sure have our range - - more holes in my ship, but she is still flying. We pour on the power and head home. Our formation is still intact except for Mac. We get out alright and are on our way home over the same route. The fire has stopped again - - thank God.

15:00 - - WE are back at the IP at 3000 feet and headed home. A little fire off to our left but we are out of range. We cross the coast again at 15:30 and rest easier. We get back to our field at 17:30. We find out we lost 3 planes - - Mac, Lt. Donald Cox who crash landed, and Lt. Harold Williams who bought it back to junk it. We got quite a few holes ourself but not bad. Our left tire will have to be changed though. They say we are to take off for Aldermaston in southern England for a resupply in the morning. I am plenty tired now. If we have another one tomorrow, I'll sign off now and get ready to go.

September 18, 1944

11:00 - - We came down here last night to get our load. This is to be a resupply mission. We are at our briefing which isn't much. They know very little about the situation or weather. All they know is where the "DZ" is and the route we are to fly. WE are to fly from here (Aldermaston) to Hatfield (north of London), to a point on the coast east of London which is called "Attu", but the name of the town is Southend, from there Margate, to the boat in the Channel, to Ostend in Belgium, to Ghent in Belgium, to Turnhout in Holland, to Lindhoven in Holland, and drop at a spot southwest of Nijmegen. This way we fly over friendly territory most of the way, but have to cross the front lines. I'd rather fly over enemy territory all the way and take a little fire here and there rather than cross the lines where their fire is concentrated. This is about all the briefing covers.

11:30 - - We are at our ships checking our load and course waiting for take off at 11:50. We have 6 1000 pound bundles inside that racks under the ship and 6 400 pound bundles inside that will be thrown out by the crew when we get there. Our load is ammunition and food so it is important that they get it in and get it soon. We are all set to go and have our regular crew and one boy from the quarter-master to help with bundles. We are taxiing out to the take off position and will get off on time. We take off and head straight out for 7 minutes and come back over the field and head out on course in formation. We are flying the right wing of the 3rd flight which is led by Lt. Ted Simon. The weather is really bad here and I sure hope it gets better.

12:30 - - We just passed Hatfield and head for Southend and the weather is getting worse. Visibility of about ½ mile and ceiling of about 900 feet. We have to fly pretty close formation and the air is rough so it looks like we're in for a work out.

13:00 - - We are crossing the English coast at Margate and headed for the boat in the Channel. We are over the water so drop down to 300 feet where the weather is better. We see several gliders down in the water with air-sea rescue boats picking up the men. We reach our boat and head for Ostend. We fly pretty low but the clouds are getting right down on the deck. Looks like we'll have to go up through it. Yes I'm right, here we go. I can still see Simon but the rest of the formation is lost. We are on top at 1500 feet and it's clear but there are ships all over the sky - - you can't fly formation on instruments. Our flight is still together though so we head for Ghent. Ships are coming up through the overcast by the hundreds. There is a lot of radio chatter as these new outfits try to regroup. We don't even try but head out in 3 ship elements. Sure hope this overcast breaks up before we get to the "DZ".

14:00 - - WE leave Ghent and head for the front lines toward Turnhout. We cross the lines and nothing happens - - could be that "Jerry" has pulled out. The clouds break up and we can see the ground spots. We are coming up on Eindhoven now and they are starting to fire. One ship ahead of us is on fire but continues on. Five chutes just came out and the ship starts a diving turn to the left. Looks like it's going to come right back through the chutes but it hits the ground and what a fire! We're past them so I can't see where they

lit. Few more just went through our ship but hurt nothing. I see the "DZ" ahead and the clouds have broken so we start down to 700 feet for the drop and slow up to 130 mph. I salvo the bundles in the racks underneath and give the crew the green light and they start throwing the ones inside out. There is a hell of a noise and the whole ship shudders but we're still going. Decker comes running up and says the bundles are gone so we pour on the coal and turn to the left and climb to head back the same we came in. I asked Decker where we got hit and he said that was just the cargo door shot open and banging against the ship. That means we have a hole in the side of the ship 6 feet by 5 feet. We will have a lot of drag with that hole. We will have to use a lot of power to keep up. That door is still on the hinges and banging against the side of the ship. It makes the loudest as well as wets up an awful vibration. We don't stop climbing, till we get to 9000 feet. It will take more than small arms to get us up here. We get back to Eidhoven and as we pass over we can see a string of ships towing gliders and headed for someplace. They are getting pretty shot up, tho. Nothing seems to bet getting us this high yet. Here it comes - - just one burst at our altitude and to our right - - that's all we get. It's really overcast now but we are in clear air above it. We head back for Turnhort and friendly territory but the clouds are so thick we can't see the ground, so just fly time and distance. We think we are over the Channel so start our let down at 200 mph. That door is really making a racket now and vibrating. We get down to 4000 feet and level off but still above the clouds.

13:30 - - We cross the English coast again according to the time and dune in our radio compass to the beacon on the field and home in. When we are about 30 minutes out we start to let down through. We get down to 400 feet and can only see ½ miles - - sure hope there is nothing too high around here. Here is the field so we go into echelon and land and find out we lost one ship today - - Lt. David Proctor and Capt. Wood's crew that I flew with in Sicily and Italy. Lt. Northcott was pretty badly shot up. According to report, Troop Carrier has lost numerous ships due to enemy action - - that's the way it goes