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“Follow Me”

NORMANDY

June 6, 1944

THEY JUMPED MUCH TOO LOW from planes that were flying much too fast. They were carrying far too much equipment and using an untested technique that turned out to be a major mistake. As they left the plane, the leg bags tore loose and hurtled to the ground, in nearly every case never to be seen again. Simultaneously, the prop blast tossed them this way and that. With all the extra weight and all the extra speed, when the chutes opened, the shock was more than they had ever experienced. Jumping at 500 feet, and even less, they hit the ground within seconds of the opening of the chute, so they hit hard. The men were black and blue for a week or more afterward as a result.

In a diary entry written a few days later, Lieutenant Winters tried to re-create his thoughts in those few seconds he was in the air: “We’re doing 150 MPH. O.K., let’s go. G-D, there goes my leg pack and every bit of equipment I have. Watch it, boy! Watch it! J-C, they’re trying to pick me up with those machine-guns. Slip, slip, try and keep close to that leg pack. There it lands beside the hedge. G-D that machine-gun. There’s a road, trees—hope I don’t hit them. Thump, well that wasn’t too bad, now let’s get out of this chute.”

Burt Christenson jumped right behind Winters. “I don’t think I did

anything I had been trained to do, but suddenly I got a tremendous shock when my parachute opened." His leg bag broke loose and "it was history." He could hear a bell ringing in Ste. Mère-Eglise, and see a fire burning in town. Machine-gun bullets "are gaining on me. I climb high into my risers. Christ, I'm headed for that line of trees. I'm descending too rapidly." As he passed over the trees, he pulled his legs up to avoid hitting them. "A moment of terror seized me. 70 ft. below and 20 ft. to my left, a German quad-mounted 20 mm antiaircraft gun is firing on the C-47's passing overhead." Lucky enough for Christenson, the Germans' line of fire was such that their backs were to him, and the noise was such that they never heard him hit, although he was only 40 yards or so away.

Christenson cut himself out of his chute, pulled his six-shot revolver, and crouched at the base of an apple tree. He stayed still, moving only his eyes.

"Suddenly I caught movement ten yards away, a silhouette of a helmeted man approaching on all fours. I reached for my cricket and clicked it once, *click-click*. There was no response. The figure began to move toward me again."

Christenson pointed his revolver at the man's chest and *clicked* again. The man raised his hands. "For Christ sake, don't shoot." It was Pvt. Woodrow Robbins, Christenson's assistant gunner on the machine-gun.

"You dumb shit, what the hell's wrong with you! Why didn't you use your cricket?" Christenson demanded in a fierce whisper.

"I lost the clicker part of the cricket."

Slowly the adrenaline drained from Christenson's brain, and the two men began backing away from the German position. They ran into Bill Randleman, who had a dead German at his feet. Randleman related that the moment he had gotten free of his chute he had fixed his bayonet. Suddenly a German came charging, his bayonet fixed. Randleman knocked the weapon aside, then impaled the German on his bayonet. "That Kraut picked the wrong guy to play bayonets with," Christenson remarked.

Lieutenant Welsh's plane was at 250 feet, "at the most," when he jumped. As he emerged from the C-47, another plane crashed immediately beneath him. He claimed that the blast from the explosion threw him up and to the side "and that saved my life." His chute opened just

in time to check his descent just enough to make the "thump" when he landed painful but not fatal.

Most of the men of Easy had a similar experience. Few of them were in the air long enough to orient themselves with any precision, although they could tell from the direction the planes were flying which was the way to the coast.

They landed to hell and gone. The tight pattern within the DZ near Ste. Marie-du-Mont that they had hoped for, indeed had counted on for quick assembly of the company, was so badly screwed up by the evasive action the pilots had taken when they hit the cloud bank that E Company men were scattered from Carentan to Ravenoville, a distance of 20 kilometers. The Pathfinders, Richard Wright and Carl Fenstermaker, came down in the Channel after their plane was hit (they were picked up by H.M.S. *Tartar*, transferred to Air Sea Rescue, and taken to England).

Pvt. Tom Burgess came down near Ste. Mère-Eglise. Like most of the paratroopers that night, he did not know where he was. Low-flying planes roared overhead, tracers chasing after them, the sky full of descending Americans, indistinct and unidentifiable figures dashing or creeping through the fields, machine-guns *pop-pop-popping* all around. After cutting himself out of his chute with his pocketknife, he used his cricket to identify himself to a lieutenant he did not know. Together they started working their way toward the beach, hugging the ubiquitous hedgerows. Other troopers joined them, some from the 82d (also badly scattered in the jump), some from different regiments of the 101st. They had occasional, brief firefights with German patrols.

The lieutenant made Burgess the lead scout. At first light, he came to a corner of the hedgerow he was following. A German soldier hiding in the junction of hedgerows rose up. Burgess didn't see him. The German fired, downward. The bullet hit Burgess's cheekbone, went through the right cheek, fractured it, tore away the hinge of the jaw, and came out the back of his neck. Blood squirted out his cheek, from the back of his neck, and from his ear. He nearly choked to death.

"I wanted to live," Burgess recalled forty-five years later. "They had hammered into us that the main thing if you get hit is don't get excited, the worst thing you can do is go nuts." So he did his best to stay calm. The guys with him patched him up as best they could, got bandages over the wounds, and helped him into a nearby barn, where he collapsed into the hay. He passed out.

At midnight, a French farmer "came out to the barn and sat there and held my hand. He even kissed my hand." He brought a bottle of wine. On the morning of June 7, the farmer fetched two medics and lent them a horse-drawn cart, which they used to take Burgess down to the beach. He was evacuated to England, then back to the States. He arrived in Boston on New Year's Eve, 1944. He was on a strictly liquid diet until March 1945, when he took his first bite of solid food since his last meal at Uppottery, June 5, 1944.

Private Gordon hit hard. He had no idea where he was, but he had a definite idea of what he was determined to do first—assemble his machine-gun. He tucked himself into a hedgerow and did the job. As he finished, "I noticed this figure coming, and I realized it was John Eubanks from the way he walked." Shortly thereafter Forrest Guth joined them. Another figure loomed in the dark. "Challenge him," Gordon said to Eubanks. Before Eubanks could do so, the man called out, "Flash." Eubanks forgot the countersign ("Thunder") and forgot that the clicker was an alternative identification option, and instead said, "Lightning." The man lobbed a grenade in on the three E Company men. They scattered, it went off, fortunately no one was hurt, the soldier disappeared, which was probably good for the group, as he was clearly much too nervous to trust.

Gordon, Eubanks, and Guth started moving down a hedgerow toward the beach. They saw an American paratrooper run through the field, crouch, and jump into a drainage ditch (there was a three-quarters moon that night, and few clouds over the land, so visibility was fair). Gordon told the others to stay still, he would check it out. He crept to the ditch, where "I encountered these two eyeballs looking up at me and the muzzle of a pistol right in my face."

"Gordon, is that you?" It was Sgt. Floyd Talbert. Now there were four. Together they continued creeping, crawling, moving toward the beach. A half-hour or so before first light, Guth heard what he was certain was the howling and whining of a convoy of 2½ ton G.I. trucks going past. How could that be? The scabornie invasion hadn't even started, much less put truck convoys ashore. Some tremendous bursts coming from inland answered the question: the noise Guth heard came from the shells passing overhead, shells from the 16-inch naval guns on the battleships offshore.

The E Company foursome joined up with a group from the 502d that had just captured a German strong point in a large farm complex that dominated the crossroads north of the beach at Ravenoville. They spent the day defending the fortress from counterattacks. In the morning of D-Day plus one, they set out southward in search of their company.

Jim Alley crashed into a wall behind a house, one of those French walls with broken glass imbedded in the top. He was cut and bleeding in several places. He backed into the corner of a garden and was in the process of cutting himself out of the harness when someone grabbed his arm. It was a young woman, standing in the bushes.

"Me American," Alley whispered. "Go vay, go vay." She went back into her house.

Alley found his leg pack, got his gear together (thirteen rounds of 60 mm mortar ammunition, four land mines, ammunition for his M-1, hand grenades, food, the base plate for the mortar and other stuff), climbed to the top of the wall, and drew machine-gun fire. It was about a foot low. He got covered with plaster before he could fall back into the garden.

He lay down to think about what to do. He ate one of his Hershey bars and decided to go out the front way. Before he could move, the young woman came out of the house, looked at him, and proceeded out the front gate. Alley figured, "This is it. I'll make my stand here." Soon she returned. A soldier stepped through the gate after her. "I had my gun on him and he had his on me." They recognized each other; he was from the 505th.

"Where the hell am I?" Alley demanded. He was told, "Ste. Mère-Eglise." He joined up with the 505th. At about daybreak he ran into Paul Rogers and Earl McClung from Easy. They spent the day, and the better part of the week that followed, fighting with the 505th.

All across the peninsula, throughout the night and into the day of D-Day, paratroopers were doing the same—fighting skirmishes, joining together in ad hoc units, defending positions, harassing the Germans, trying to link up with their units. This was exactly what they had been told to do. Their training and confidence thus overcame what could have been a disaster, and thereby turned the scattered drop from a negative into a plus. The Germans, hearing reports of action here, there, everywhere, grossly overestimated the number of troopers

they were dealing with, and therefore acted in a confused and hesitant manner.

Winters had come down on the edge of Ste. Mère-Eglise. He could see the big fire near the church, hear the church bell calling out the citizens to fight the fire. He could not find his leg bag. The only weapon he had was his bayonet, stuck into his boot. His first thought was to get away from the machine-gun and small arms fire in the church square. Just as he started off, a trooper landed close by. Winters helped him out of his chute, got a grenade from him, and said, "Let's go back and find my leg bag." The trooper hesitated. "Follow me," Winters ordered and started off. A machine-gun opened up on them. "To hell with the bag," Winters said. He set out to the north to bypass Ste. Mère-Eglise before turning east to the coast. In a few minutes, he saw some figures and used his cricket. He got a reassuring double *click-click* from Sergeant Lipton.

Lipton had landed in a walled-in area behind the *hôtel de ville* (city hall) in Ste. Mère-Eglise, a block from the church. Like Winters, he had lost his weapon when he lost his leg bag. In his musette bag he had two grenades and a demolitions kit, plus his trench knife. He climbed over a gate and worked his way down the street, away from the church and the fire. At the edge of town there was a low, heavy concrete signpost with the name of the village on it. Lipton put his face up close to the letters and moved along them, reading them one by one, until he knew that the sign read "Ste. Mère-Eglise."

Paratroopers were coming down around him. Not wanting to get shot by a nervous American, when he saw two coming down close together, he ran right under them. When they hit the ground, before they could even think about shooting, Lipton was already talking to them. They were from the 82d Airborne, 10 kilometers away from where they were supposed to be. Sergeant Guarnere joined up, along with Don Malarkey, Joe Toye, and Popeye Wynn. A few minutes later, Lipton ran into Winters.

"I saw a road sign down there," Lipton reported. "Ste. Mère-Eglise."

"Good," Winters answered. "I know where that is. I can take it from here." He set out at the head of the group, objective Ste. Marie-du-Mont. They joined a bunch from the 502d. About 0300 hours they spotted a German patrol, four wagons coming down the road. They set up an ambush, and there Guarnere got his first revenge for his brother, as he

blasted the lead wagons. The other two got away, but E Company took a few prisoners.

A German machine-gun opened fire on the group. When it did, the prisoners tried to jump the Americans. Guarnere shot them with his pistol. "No remorse," he said when describing the incident forty-seven years later. "No pity. It was as easy as stepping on a bug." After a pause, he added, "We are different people now than we were then."

At about 0600 hours they ran into Capt. Jerre Gross of D Company and forty of his men. They joined forces to head toward Ste. Marie-du-Mont, some 8 kilometers southeast. In a few minutes they ran into the 2d Battalion staff with about forty more men. Winters found an M-1, then a revolver, belt, canteen, and lots of ammunition, "so I was feeling ready to fight—especially after I bummed some food from one of the boys." Lipton found a carbine. The others armed themselves.

As the Americans moved toward Ste. Marie-du-Mont, so did the commander of the German unit defending the area, Col. Frederick von der Heydte of the 6th Parachute Regiment. He was an experienced soldier, having been in the German Army since the mid-1920s and having led men in combat in Poland, France, Russia, Crete, and North Africa. Colonel von der Heydte was the senior German officer present, as the division commanders were in Rennes, on the Seine River, for a war game. He had one battalion in and around Ste. Mère-Eglise, another near Ste. Marie-du-Mont, the third in Carentan. All his platoons were standing too, some were trying to engage the Americans, but confusion caused by reports of landings here, there, seemingly everywhere had made concerted counterattacks impossible.

Colonel von der Heydte wanted to see for himself. He drove his motorcycle from Carentan to Ste. Marie-du-Mont, where he climbed to the top of the church steeple, 50 or 60 meters above the ground. There he had a magnificent view of Utah Beach.

What he saw quite took his breath away. "All along the beach," he recalled in a 1991 interview, "were these small boats, hundreds of them, each disgorging thirty or forty armed men. Behind them were the warships, blasting away with their huge guns, more warships in one fleet than anyone had ever seen before."

Around the church, in the little village and beyond in the green fields crisscrossed by hedgerows, all was quiet. The individual firefights

of the night had tapered off with the coming of light. Von der Heydte could see neither American nor German units.

Climbing down from the steeple, the colonel drove his motorcycle a couple of kilometers north to Brécourt Manor, where the German artillery had a battery of four 105 mm cannon dug in and camouflaged. There were no artillery men around, evidently they had scattered in the night after the airborne landings began. Von der Heydte roared back to Carantan, where he ordered his 1st Battalion to occupy and hold Ste. Marie-du-Mont and Brécourt, and to find some artilleymen to get that battery working. It was perfectly placed to lob shells on the landing craft on Utah Beach, and to engage the warships out in the Channel.

By this time, about 0700, E Company consisted of two light machine-guns, one bazooka (no ammunition), one 60 mm mortar, nine riflemen, and two officers. As the 2d Battalion moved into a group of houses in a tiny village called Le Grand-Chemin, just three kilometers or so short of Ste. Marie-du-Mont, it drew heavy fire from up front. The column stopped, Winters and his men sat down to rest. Ten or fifteen minutes later, battalion S-1 Lt. George Lavenson, formerly of E Company, came walking down the road. "Winters," he said, "they want you up front."

Captain Hester, S-3, and Lieutenant Nixon, S-2, both close friends of Winters, told him there was a four-gun battery of German 105 mm cannon a few hundred meters across some hedgerows and open fields, opposite a large French farmhouse called Brécourt Manor. Intelligence had not spotted the cannon, as they were dug into the hedgerow, connected by an extensive trench system, covered by brush and trees. There was a fifty-man platoon of infantry defending the position (part of Colonel von der Heydt's 1st Battalion); the cannon had just gone into action, firing on Utah Beach, some 4 or 5 kilometers to the northeast.

The 2d Battalion was less than 100 men strong at that point. Lieutenant Colonel Strayer had responsibilities in all four directions from Le Grand-Chemin. He was trying to build his battalion up to somewhere near its full strength of 600 men, and to defend from counterattacks. He could only afford to send one company to attack the German battery. Hester told Winters to take care of that battery.

It was 0830. Captain Sobel was about to get a little revenge on Hitler, the U.S. Army was about to get a big payoff from its training and equipment investment, the American people were about to get their reward for having raised such fine young men. The company that Sobel and the Army and the country had brought into being and trained for this moment was going into action.

Winters went to work instinctively and immediately. He told the men of E Company to drop all the equipment they were carrying except weapons, ammunition, and grenades. He explained that the attack would be a quick frontal assault supported by a base of fire from different positions as close to the guns as possible. He set up the two machine-guns to give covering fire as he moved the men forward to their jump-off positions.

The field in which the cannon were located was irregular in shape, with seven acute angles in the hedgerow surrounding it. This gave Winters an opportunity to hit the Germans from different directions.

Winters placed his machine-guns (manned by Pvts. John Plesha and Walter Hendrix on one gun, Cleveland Petty and Joe Liebgott on the other) along the hedge leading up to the objective, with instructions to lay down covering fire. As Winters crawled forward to the jump-off position, he spotted a German helmet—the man was moving down the trench, crouched over, with only his head above ground. Winters took aim with his M-1 and squeezed off two shots, killing the Jerry.

Winters told Lieutenant Compton to take Sergeants Guarnere and Malarkey, get over to the left, crawl through the open field, get as close to the first gun in the battery as possible, and throw grenades into the trench. He sent Sergeants Lipton and Ranney out along the hedge to the right, alongside a copse of trees, with orders to put a flanking fire into the enemy position.

Winters would lead the charge straight down the hedge. With him were Pvts. Gerald Lorraine (of regimental HQ; he was Colonel Sink's jeep driver) and Popeye Wynn and Cpl. Joe Toye.

Here the training paid off. "We fought as a team without standout stars," Lipton said. "We were like a machine. We didn't have anyone who leaped up and charged a machine-gun. We knocked it out or made it withdraw by maneuver and teamwork or mortar fire. We were smart; there weren't many flashy heroics. We had learned that heroics was the

way to get killed without getting the job done, and getting the job done was more important."

When Ranney and Lipton moved out along the hedge, they discovered they could not see the German positions because of low brush and ground cover. Lipton decided to climb a tree, but there were none of sufficient size to allow him to fire from behind a trunk. The one he picked had many small branches; he had to sit precariously on the front side, facing the Germans, exposed if they looked his way, balancing on several branches. About 75 meters away, he could see about fifteen of the enemy, some in the trenches, others prone in the open, firing toward E Company, too intent on the activity to their front to notice Lipton.

Lipton was armed with a carbine he had picked up during the night. He fired at a German in the field. The enemy soldier seemed to duck. Lipton fired again. His target did not move. Not certain that the carbine had been zeroed in, Lipton aimed into the dirt just under the man's head and squeezed off another round. The dirt flew up right where he aimed; Lipton now knew that the carbine's sights were right and his first shot had killed the man. He began aiming and firing as fast as he could from his shaky position.

Lieutenant Compton was armed with a Thompson submachine-gun that he had picked up during the night (he got it from a lieutenant from D Company who had broken his leg in the jump). Using all his athletic skill, he successfully crawled through the open field to the hedge, Guarnerre and Malarkey alongside him. The Germans were receiving fire from the machine-gun to their left, from Lipton and Ranney to their rear, and from Winters's group in their front. They did not notice Compton's approach.

When he reached the hedge, Compton leaped over and through it. He had achieved complete surprise and had the German gun crew and infantry dead in his sights. But when he pulled the trigger on the borrowed tommy-gun, nothing happened. It was jammed.

At that instant, Winters called, "Follow me," and the assault team went tearing down the hedge toward Compton. Simultaneously, Guarnerre leaped into the trench beside Compton. The German crew at the first gun, under attack from three directions, fled. The infantry retreated with them, tearing down the trench, away from Compton, Guarnerre, and Malarkey. The Easy Company men began throwing grenades at the retreating enemy.

Compton had been an All-American catcher on the UCLA baseball

team. The distance to the fleeing enemy was about the same as from home plate to second base. Compton threw his grenade on a straight line—no arch—and it hit a German in the head as it exploded. He, Malarkey, and Guarnerre then began lobbing grenades down the trench.

Winters and his group were with them by now, firing their rifles, throwing grenades, shouting, their blood pumping, adrenaline giving them Superman strength.

Wynn was hit in the butt and fell down in the trench, hollering over and over, "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, I goofed off, I goofed off, I'm sorry." A German potato masher sailed into the trench; everyone dived to the ground.

"Joe, look out!" Winters called to Toye. The grenade had landed between his legs as he lay face down. Toye flipped over. The potato masher hit his rifle and tore up the stock as it exploded, but he was uninjured. "If it wasn't for Winters," Toye said in 1990, "I'd be singing high soprano today."

Winters tossed some grenades down the trench, then went tearing after the retreating gun crew. Private Lorraine and Sergeant Guarnerre were with him. Three of the enemy infantry started running cross-country, away toward Brécourt Manor.

"Get 'em!" Winters yelled. Lorraine hit one with his tommy-gun; Winters aimed his M-1, squeezed, and shot his man through the back of his head. Guarnerre missed the third Jerry, but Winters put a bullet in his back. Guarnerre followed that up by pumping the wounded man full of lead from his tommy-gun. The German kept yelling, "Help! Help!" Winters told Malarkey to put one through his head.

A fourth German jumped out of the trench, about 100 yards up the hedge. Winters saw him, lay down, took careful aim, and killed him. Fifteen or twenty seconds had passed since he had led the charge. Easy had taken the first gun.

Winters's immediate thought was that there were plenty of Germans farther up the trench, and they would be counterattacking soon. He flopped down, crawled forward in the trench, came to a connecting trench, looked down, "and sure enough there were two of them setting up a machine-gun, getting set to fire. I got in the first shot and hit the gunner in the hip; the second caught the other boy in the shoulder."

Winters put Toye and Compton to firing toward the next gun, sent three other men to look over the captured cannon, and three to cover to the front. By this time Lipton had scrambled out of his tree and was

working his way to Winters. Along the way he stopped to sprinkle some sulfa powder on Wynn's butt and slap on a bandage. Wynn continued to apologize for goofing off. Warrant Officer Andrew Hill, from regimental HQ, came up behind Lipton.

"Where's regimental HQ?" he shouted.

"Back that way," Lipton said, pointing to the rear. Hill raised his head to look. A bullet hit him in the forehead and came out behind his ear, killing him instantly.

After that, all movement was confined to the trench system, and in a crouch, as German machine-gun fire was nearly continuous, cutting right across the top of the trench. But Malarkey saw one of the Germans killed by Winters, about 30 yards out in the field, with a black case attached to his belt. Malarkey thought it must be a Luger. He wanted it badly, so he ran out into the field, only to discover that it was a leather case for the 105 mm sight. Winters was yelling at him, "Idiot, this place is crawling with Krauts, get back here!" Evidently the Germans thought Malarkey was a medic; in any case the machine-guns did not turn on him until he started running back to the trench. With bullets kicking up all around him, he dived under the 105.

Winters was at the gun, wanting to disable it but without a demolition kit. Lipton came up and said he had one in his musette bag, which was back where the attack began. Winters told him to go get it.

Time for the second gun, Winters thought to himself. He left three men behind to hold the first gun, then led the other five on a charge down the trench, throwing grenades ahead of them, firing their rifles. They passed the two Jerries at the machine-gun who had been wounded by Winters and made them prisoners. The gun crew at the second gun fell back; Easy took it with only one casualty.

With the second gun in his possession, and running low on ammunition, Winters sent back word for the four machine-guns to come forward. Meanwhile six German soldiers decided they had had enough; they came marching down the connecting trench to the second gun, hands over their heads, calling out "No make dead! No make dead!"

Pvt. John D. Hall of A Company joined the group. Winters ordered a charge on the third gun. Hall led the way, and got killed, but the gun was taken. Winters had three of his men secure it. With eleven men, he now controlled three 105s.

At the second gun site, Winters found a case with documents and maps showing the positions of all the guns and machine-gun positions

throughout the Cotentin Peninsula. He sent the documents and maps back to battalion, along with the prisoners and a request for more ammunition and some reinforcements, because "we were stretched out too much for our own good." Using grenades, he set about destroying the gun crews' radio, telephone, and range finders.

Captain Hester came up, bringing three blocks of TNT and some phosphorus incendiary grenades. Winters had a block dropped down the barrel of each of the three guns, followed by a German potato-masher grenade. This combination blew out the breeches of the guns like half-peeled bananas. Lipton was disappointed when he returned with his demolition kit to discover that it was not needed.

Reinforcements arrived, five men led by Lt. Ronald Speirs of D Company. One of them, "Rusty" Houch of F Company, raised up to throw a grenade into the gun positions and was hit several times across the back and shoulders by a burst from a machine-gun. He died instantly.

Speirs led an attack on the final gun, which he took and destroyed, losing two men killed.

Winters then ordered a withdrawal, because the company was drawing heavy machine-gun fire from the hedges near Brécourt Manor, and with the guns destroyed there was no point to holding the position. The machine-guns pulled back first, followed by the riflemen. Winters was last. As he was leaving he took a final look down the trench. "Here was this one wounded Jerry we were leaving behind trying to put a MG on us again, so I drilled him clean through the head." It was 11:30. About three hours had passed since Winters had received the order to take care of those guns.

With twelve men, what amounted to a squad (later reinforced by Speirs and the others), Company E had destroyed a German battery that was looking straight down causeway No. 2 and onto Utah Beach. That battery had a telephone line running to a forward observer who was in a pillbox located at the head of causeway No. 2. He had been calling shots down on the 4th Infantry as it unloaded. The significance of what Easy Company had accomplished cannot be judged with any degree of precision, but it surely saved a lot of lives, and made it much easier—perhaps even made it possible in the first instance—for tanks to come inland from the beach. It would be a gross exaggeration to say that Easy Company saved the day at Utah Beach, but reasonable to say

that it made an important contribution to the success of the invasion. Winters's casualties were four dead, two wounded. He and his men had killed fifteen Germans, wounded many more, and taken twelve prisoners; in short, they had wiped out the fifty-man platoon of elite German paratroops defending the guns, and scattered the gun crews. In an analysis written in 1985, Lipton said, "The attack was a unique example of a small, well-led assault force overcoming and routing a much larger defending force in prepared positions. It was the high morale of the E Company men, the quickness and audacity of the frontal attack, and the fire into their positions from several different directions that demoralized the German forces and convinced them that they were being hit by a much larger force."

There were other factors, including the excellent training the company had received, and that this was their baptism of fire. The men had taken chances they would not take in the future. Lipton said he never would have climbed that tree and so exposed himself had he been a veteran. "But we were so full of fire that day."

"You don't realize, your first time," Guarnere said. "I'd never, never do again what I did that morning." Compton would not have burst through that hedge had he been experienced. "I was sure I would not be killed," Lipton said. "I felt that if a bullet was headed for me it would be deflected or I would move."

(Paul Fussell, in *Wartime*, writes that the soldier going into combat the first time thinks to himself, "It *can't* happen to me. I am too clever / agile / well-trained / good-looking / beloved / tightly laced, etc." That feeling soon gives way to "It *can* happen to me, and I'd better be more careful. I can avoid the danger by watching more prudently the way I take cover / dig in / expose my position by firing my weapon / keep extra alert at all times, etc."¹)

In his analysis, Winters gave credit to the Army for having prepared him so well for this moment ("my apogee," he called it). He had done everything right, from scouting the position to laying down a base of covering fire, to putting his best men (Compton, Guarnere, and Malarkey in one group, Lipton and Ranney in the other) on the most challenging missions, to leading the charge personally at exactly the right moment.

¹ Fussell, *Wartime*, 282.

Winters felt that if Sobel had been in command, he would have led all thirteen men on a frontal assault and lost his life, along with the lives of most of the men. Who can say he was wrong about that? But then, who can say that the men of Easy would have had the discipline, the endurance (they had been marching since 0130, after a night of little or no real sleep; they were battered and bruised from the opening shock and the hard landing) or the weapons skills to carry off this fine feat of arms, had it not been for Sobel?

Sink put Winters in for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Only one man per division was to be given that ultimate medal for the Normandy campaign; in the 101st it went to Lt. Col. Robert Cole for leading a bayonet charge; Winters received the Distinguished Service Cross, Compton, Guarnere, Lorraine, and Toye got the Silver Star; Lipton, Malarkey, Ranney, Liebgott, Hendrix, Plesha, Petty, and Wynn got Bronze Stars.