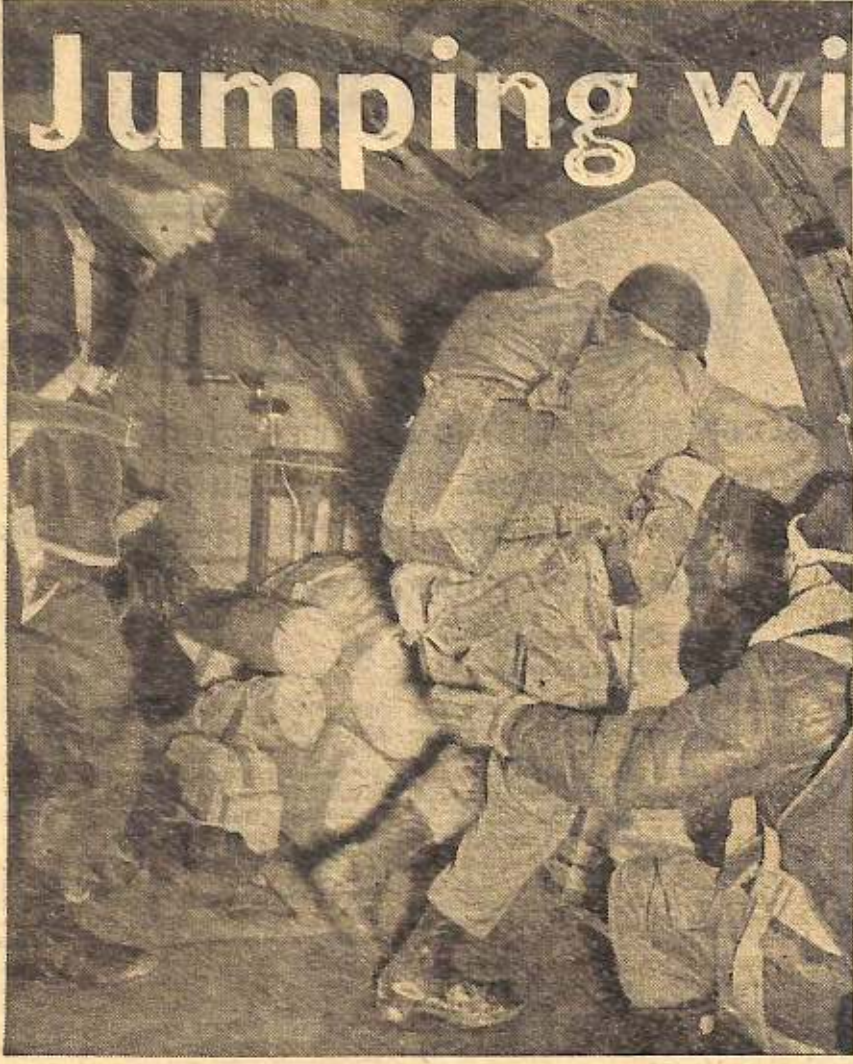


Jumping with the Chips down

'Toil and sweat' is the motto at an ETO Training Center where Army Specialists qualify as Paratroopers

By Philip Bucknell
Stars and Stripes Staff Writer

Photos by Koenig



GO! Capt. Herbert Sobell, watches the students making their first jump. Cpl. Cheney, kneeling, is jumpmaster.

QUESTION: What is a parachute?
Answer: The most convenient form of transportation in given circumstances.

Which is the way the learned instructors at a Training Center in the ETO put it. A victim would come nearer the truth if he described it as an expanse of cloth with pieces of cord which, before use, entails weeks of physical and mental agony; after use lets you down with a heck of a jolt, but, during use, gives the parachutist a sensation of pure elation.

This story has nothing to do with the making of a paratrooper, nothing of the months of task force preparation which makes the American trooper one of the world's finest fighting men, it is just an account of what the Army require of a man before they allow him to throw himself out of a transport plane with a parachute on his back—as if that were not enough!

Tough Training Program

The training center has been set up to train specialists whose work will take them into combat with the paratroopers. The last class also included two reporters—this writer who made one jump, clumsily, and is now on sick call with a beaten up knee, and Bill Walton of Time and Life who completed his five jumps and can, if he wishes, kick his way through the ranks of civilian correspondents in paratroop boots as the one newspaperman to have qualified as a jumper. (Not the first reporter to jump—Jack Thompson of the Chicago Tribune dropped in North Africa and Sicily with the troopers.)

The center is run by a captain and a handful of noncoms whose motives appear to the newcomer as purely malicious and coming from people who like watching men suffer. Later in the course one realizes, albeit dimly, that their motives are honor-

able enough. They are there to see that the men who jump are ready, mentally and physically, for the jump.

The instructors get to know the men and their weaknesses, and the men get to know the strength of their chutes. Every morning the class attends a packing shed where riggers from a paratroop outfit teach them all there is to know about that filmy piece of a silk or nylon which will lower them with not unreasonable speed to the ground. The riggers, whose job is not merely that of maintaining and packing chutes, but includes jumping demonstration jumps for the classes and preparing themselves for the time they jump their own chutes over enemy territory, have quite a lot to do with their pupils.

The trainee is not merely told about the 28 panels, each of four sections, and the tensile strength of the suspension lines, but is taught why that chute is as good as a Government insurance policy with the insured guy drawing the benefits. This is just as well, as the trainee at the end of the course has to pack five chutes for his qualifying jumps and to a person who could never pack a Christmas parcel or fold a blanket that would pass a sergeant's inspection, the foolproof qualities of the TM/1 is a source of comfort.

Thirty is Old Here

In this world of paratroopers where the age of 30 is approaching senility, the doyen of the riggers is Sgt. Orvel Shastid, of Fayetteville, Ark., whose venerable 29 years gives him the title of "Pop," but there are a few young men around. Eugene C. Baldwin, a T/5 of Elko, Neb., about as good an instructor as there comes, is one. There are also Ross C. Christey, of Helmsville, Mont., and Eugene Dyal, of Baxley, Ga., and they all shave. The senior noncom is Marvin M. Mitchell, of Tippa,

Miss., a master sergeant who will not give his age. 2/Lt. Blaire Pothie, of Haverhill, Mass., is in charge here.

In their air-conditioned shed these men teach the art of stowing a chute, taking the trainee through every stage with patience. And these chutes are lovely things to work with. The soft nylon or silk of the 28-foot diameter canopies are soft and yielding to the touch, bringing strange nostalgic memories of pre-Pearl Harbor days. The morning sessions with the riggers were pleasantly remote from the rigors of the afternoons—until the trainee packs the first chute he is to jump with.

When he first folds the silk and stows the lines and bundles the whole thing scientifically into its green duck case and laces it down he knows darned well that, brother, his white chips are down.

It is the afternoon program, though, that will remain longest in the memories of men who have gone through the training here. When the instructors keep on and on until breaking point of the men is reached—and then carry on. When push-ups for punishment are dealt out with the lavishness of beer at a barbecue. When four hours of exhaustion are rounded off by a three-to-five-mile run.

Learning on Mock-ups

Sgt. Elmer L. Murray, of Inglewood, Cal., took time out to inform a drooping class that had been doing full knee bends with variations for ten minutes straight that the thing that makes a paratroop is that "when he reaches the stage of 'can't' he still carries on." Murray, who prefers to be known as Moe—if anybody ever calls an instructor at this school by his first name—is one of the kind they breed here. He looks like he could go on for ever. There is only one way to stop him and that is to suggest that California isn't the best place in the world, and then he would defy the General Staff to prove that it was—but that could be attributed to the fact that he was born in Des Moines, Iowa.

The hour's calisthenics is about as rugged as anything this writer has seen, and he has been going around different units for over a year.

Capt. Herbert Sobell commands the training center, and by this time he is resigned to the fact that during the first week everybody wishes that he had stayed in Chicago, his hometown. Later on the men realize that he is willing to stick out any class with them, to jump dummy in a demonstration at any time and to go out on their runs, galloping from formation to formation spurring them on, they begin to feel that even if they could never look on Sobell as a bosom friend, he is giving them what it takes to be a jumper.

After the calisthenics the class is split into three separate formations, each concentrating for a period on different

apparatus, each simulating some stage of jumping.

There are mock harnesses in which men are suspended while they learn how to manipulate a chute. Contrary to general belief it is possible to direct a jump to some extent by pulling on the risers—the webbing lines that connect the harness with the suspension lines running down from the canopy. There are four of these and pulling on two or more will have the effect of spilling air out of the canopy in various sections, causing the chute to swerve in one direction or another. Pulling on the two front ones, for instance, causes a comparatively vertical drop while a pull on the back risers will result in the wind carrying the chute along on its course. Tugs on the right or left risers guide the jumpers sideways, and a movement known as a body turn which involves getting a strangle-hold on oneself, at the same time grasping all four risers will turn a man completely around.

This form of crucifixion, although strenuous at first, is the most popular as there is, at least, no strain on the legs.

More active is the drill in the mock-up plane, made of corrugated iron to look like the fuselage of the C47 out of which the men will later jump. Along the length is a steel rope known as the anchor line. A web line 15 feet long, the static line, which is connected to the cover of the chute pack on the jumper's back, is snapped on to the anchor line by means of a metal fastener.

In playing for keeps this static line is the thing that causes the chute to open. When the man, jumping from the door, reaches the end of its 15 feet, his weight jerks the cover loose from the chute and by a progression (instantaneous in action) of breakeven fastenings in the packing, the canopy is released from its case. Wind from the prop wash fills it and the jumper sails earthwards.

In the mock-up the trainees are concerned with form only and are equipped with straw filled packs—one on the back simulating the automatic release chute attached to the static line, and in front a smaller chute, the reserve, which can be released should the main chute fail, by pulling a ripcord.

Push Ups for Punishment

The orders of the drill are: Stand up, hook up, check equipment, sound off for equipment check, close up, stand in the door and go. There is a style in going, too. Briefly, when a man approaches the door he pivots on his right foot, slams his left foot into the door, toes over the step, bends at the knees, hands outside the door, his whole body balanced like a man about to tackle. His head should be erect. With the command "go" he jumps vigorously outwards, turning a quarter left, ducks his head into his chest to avoid concussion from the opening chute, keeps his knees and toes together

and counts, "one thousand, two thousand, three thousand," during which time the chute should be open. If not he knows he should pull the ripcord on his reserve.

This all sounds very complicated—and it is.

From this drill comes more punishments than all the rest put together.

Tough little Cpl. Bill Cheney, of Concord, N.H., is kingpin at this stage in the game, and to him a man in the mock-up whether he be captain or pfc is just a sucker who, unless he learns his lessons properly, is going to get hurt, and if the only way he can learn is by doing extra push-ups or running round the field, well, that's the way it's got to be. At one time in the last class there was a sergeant who had not said that he was happy when asked doing 50 push-ups, intoning "I am very happy," the while; a lieutenant sullen and solitary loping round the field declaiming "Number 8 OK," and young First Lieutenant Alfred G. Lapitino, of New York, dressed in his harness, wending his way up a long slope like a peanut vendor solemnly declaring, "I must make a quarter turn; I must make a quarter turn."

Cheney watched his victims for a while with a disapproving snarl on his round, soured, cherubic face, and said, "Sloppy and ragged, sloppy and ragged. I've never seen such a bunch of sloppy soldiers in my life." Then turned round and found some more.

Landing Made Easy

There is only one case on record where a pupil has drawn a royal flush to the instructors' four of a kind and that happened to Sgt. Harold A. Bliss, who has slightly mellowed since he heard from his wife in Shelby, Ohio, that he became the father of a girl a week or two back. Bliss had an officer from his old outfit doing push-ups, and that officer and another instructor got together on an idea. One night Bliss was called from his hutment to see "somebody from your outfit." The instructor ran out passing his officer pupil. "Sergeant," said the officer, "don't you know you should salute an officer when you pass him?—give me 25 push-ups." Bliss did.

Then there is practice jumping and rolling. Obviously when a man knows that he will be landing at the rate of 15 to 20 feet a second he realizes that unless he learns the right way to meet the ground the shock is going to hurt. The method of landing taught is one the paratroopers have learned from the British—toes and knees together, knees slightly bent and, immediately the balls of the feet touch the ground, the jumper rolls over on the side of his knee to his hips and over on his shoulder, all done with a follow through action that brings him up on his feet again after a semi-somersault. This



As it must to all men, calisthenics came to Bill Walton, of Time magazine. Cpl. Flanagan (back to camera) takes a class in toughening-up exercises. This is the hour that students like least.



"I must make a quarter turn." 1/Lt. Alfred G. Lapitino, of New York, pays off with a run for forgetting his lines.



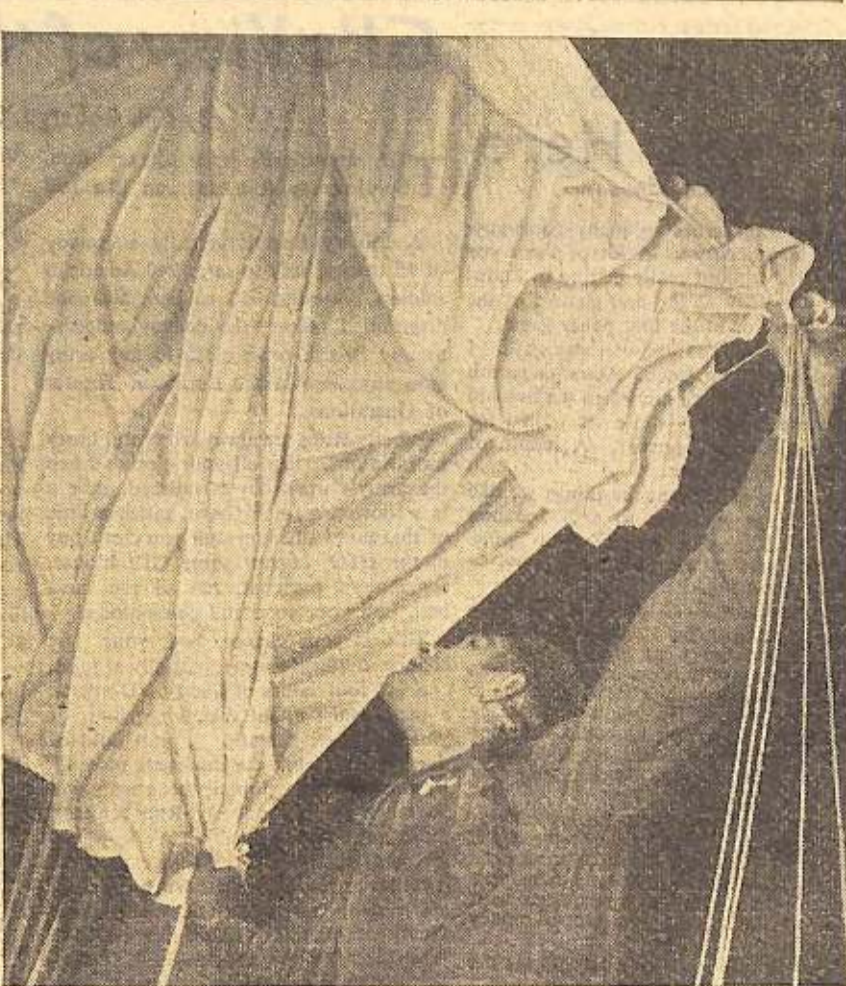
S/Sgt. Daniel M. Naville, of Miami, Fla., Cpl. William M. Field, of Nashville, Tenn., and Pvt. Thomas H. Younger, of New York, practice parachute manipulation in mock harness.



Sgt. Shastid and Cpl. Baldwin put on a parachute packing display for M/Sgt. Wm. Mitchell, of New York, Cpl. James Kennedy, of Bellair, Ohio, and Pvt. Wm. Eastman, of New York. Senior noncom, M/Sgt. Marvin Mitchell, looks on.



A phase of parachute maintenance is explained to Sgt. Fred Leeds, of Neburgh, N.Y., by S/Sgt. Harold Hunt, of San Francisco, seated at the sewing machine. The trainee is told about the chute and of its foolproof qualities.



Pvt. Sam J. Sutton, of Holt, Tex., a rigger, examines a parachute for tears after it has been jumped.

first rehearsed on the ground; then from a five foot box and lastly from a platform about seven feet high. In addition to these jump rehearsals there are such things as rope climbing, chin-ups and those heart-breaking runs. A favorite trick on the runs is to take the class on a double-time tour of the country, bringing them back to within easy reach of home, by which time most of the men are wondering if they can stay the last stretch, then, just before the final half mile, the instructors find a road running off at right angles that winds up a hill and lead their battered charges off on this extra haul.

On at least one occasion two reporters limped along wondering if they'd make home before bed-check. In view of their advanced age—a few years over the 30 mark—this action met with, if not sympathy, some understanding on the part of the task masters.

Looking back, these task masters were pretty good Joes. But only on looking back.

There is Cpl. Jim Flanagan, an Irishman out of Augusta, Ga., who left high school two years back to get into the paratroops. Tall, blonde and slim, he still has a high schoolboy's relish for life and seems to find everything annoyingly doggone good fun. He doesn't bawl the men out as much as the rest but makes you feel that if he can find so much pleasure in doing the various tasks something must be wrong with you to have such weary bones.

Nisson Hut Sessions

And there is Sgt. Don H. Austin, of Warwick, Rhode Island, who spends a lot of his free time trying to get permission to do crazier and crazier forms of jumping. He and Cheney a few weeks back went down to a British school in order to jump from a stationary balloon. Now he thinks a free jump (without a static line opening the chute) would be a good thing to do. So for that matter does Sobell and the rest who are trying to organize that thing.

Cpl. Gerald L. Strickhouser, of York, Pa., is new to the training center, knows his jumping and has not quite got rid of his morbid interest in the aches and pains of the trainees. The orderly room clerk is Cpl. Robert R. "Tip" Dye, of Honolulu, who must be one of the tallest jumpers in the service. He has an ecclesiastical approach to life, but lacks churchly language when he expresses himself on the difference in Hawaiian and British weather.

Lastly there is S/Sgt. John G. Dragos, of Canton, Ohio, the senior noncom who, on account of his 29 years, the others call "Gramps," except when they want an over-rough pass. Dragos has a nice comfortable approach to life, is fond of his cot nearest the fire in the instructors' hutment and says, "I know the men cuss me, and they're right. I used to cuss my instructors. That's the way it is. But if I give them poosh-ups for their own good."

Dragos hasn't quite made up his mind what he wants to do after the war, whether to have a flower farm or a chicken farm. His preference is for flowers, but, on the other hand, he figures, if his project fails he could always eat chicken.

In the students' Nissen huts the men lie around on their double decker bunks, shoot craps and bull, play cards. In the first evenings between chow and 9 PM bed-check conversations hinge on aches and pains.

Shock-headed "Louisiana," Pvt. Julius

A. Klein, of Erwinville, La., puts it for the rest: "When this war's over I'm going to crawl right back into the swamps and forests and I don't care if I never see the daylight no moh, no sir."

Around mid-session when the stiffness begins to wear off, the men reminisce quite a bit. Pfc Fred "Rocky" Campbell, of Fairmont, W.Va., tells about how he secured for himself the title, but not the duties, of KP on the ship coming over, which allowed him to eat what he wanted without working for it. "Had to sprinkle flour all over me one time when an inspecting officer came around."

Then, as jump day comes around, when the parachutes are packed and ready, men fall to analyzing their reactions. They think they'll be all right . . . they hope they'll be all right. Stories go around about the time they once heard tell about when a chute had failed to open. Someone will make a joke about broken legs, or worse, and the others laugh to show they are not afraid. And jump day comes . . . and goes because the weather wasn't right for a training jump. And another.

Sweating Out the Jump

This is not the sweating it out of a combat crews' night before the mission when flak and fighters are known to be waiting. Or the uneasy scrabbling in fox-holes waiting for mortars and artillery and tanks and dive-bombers to search you out.

This is waiting on the moment you have volunteered for, to throw yourself out of a door of an airplane trusting that a piece of nylon will carry you safely to earth—nylon that would have been made into hose and cute things for girl friends and wives back home had not a handful of power crazed people . . . But you're feeling that, perhaps, not thinking it.

You know that that thing that will happen tomorrow is a jump with four more to follow to qualify you to jump again sometime, not on quiet British countryside, but in some place where the enemy waits. Into a position from which there may be relief, but no retreat.

But first and foremost you are asking yourself: When the jumpmaster says Go, am I going to throw myself out of the door?

When the trucks come round to take you to the airfield you say I hope he

doesn't drive fast 'cause I scare easily, and that shows you're not afraid. And when you reach the field and see the C47s waiting with a group of curious airmen around you say it looks like a nice day for jumping which shows how calm you are.

Inside the plane you watch the other men's faces and realize that nobody likes it but, by God, they are as fine a crowd of men you ever did see, and wonder if they have got butterflies like you have. They probably have because you remember experienced jumpers, men with 20 and 30 jumps, telling you how every time they go up they wonder why in hell they went into this thing.

Stand in the Door—Go!

The atmosphere is as taut as a harp string. We are the last plane to go in over the Drop Zone and we cruise backwards and forwards. Jim Flanagan moves up and down the plane, grinning easily, and you envy him. He talks with the pilot and navigator, and you half hope somebody is going to say that the weather or something isn't right.

Then—"First stick, stand up, hook up." "Stand in the door."

The first six men, cumbersome in their harness, static lines over their shoulders, move down the plane.

"Go." Without a pause, in rapid sequence the men, these rookies, throw themselves out into 1,200 feet of air. Then the next stick. And the next. Then our stick.

(At this point, this writer, who rates no laurels, wishes to say, "Thanks, Jim Flanagan, for that push. I doubt if I'd have made it without. Do it again next time.")

There is a blackness, filled with rushing wind, and then a jerk as the parachute opens, and then a sensation of motionless floating that surpasses description. You are easy and free. You don't appear to move, only the ground and sky sway slightly.

Five Jumps Qualify

The ground comes up to meet you; small figures, then larger, become distinguishable. You are aloft and aloof. Then the ground comes up at you at a faster rate and you prepare to land. Feet together, knees together and slightly bent, Whambo!

Here this reporter's personal experiences end, because a puff of wind caught him just before he reached the ground and threw that body position he had practiced with such care all out of true and the landing jarred a knee.

But the others, they went back again next day and completed their five. Four jumps in a day and they got mighty sore and stiff. They didn't like it. Each one was harder than the last, and by the time they finished the five they decided that three blankets and a straw mattress in a Nissen hut was better than a 48-hour pass in Miami.

But they had made it. And they were proud.

A senior officer told them when they got their wings that they had qualified to join the finest team of soldiers in the Army. In front of them is hard and rigorous training and, one day, that combat jump. But right now they are on top of the world.

If anyone thinks that at this time the extra \$50 a month jump pay is going to be mentioned they are crazy. Those men have acquired something that doesn't have a column in the pay roll.

Paratrooper's Prayer

This prayer was composed by the Chaplain of a Paratroop outfit and is now part of every church service attended by the jumpers.

The Chaplain himself is a trained paratrooper and has made combat jumps with his men.

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who art above us and beneath us, within us and around us, drive from the minds of our paratroops any fear of the space in which Thou art ever present.

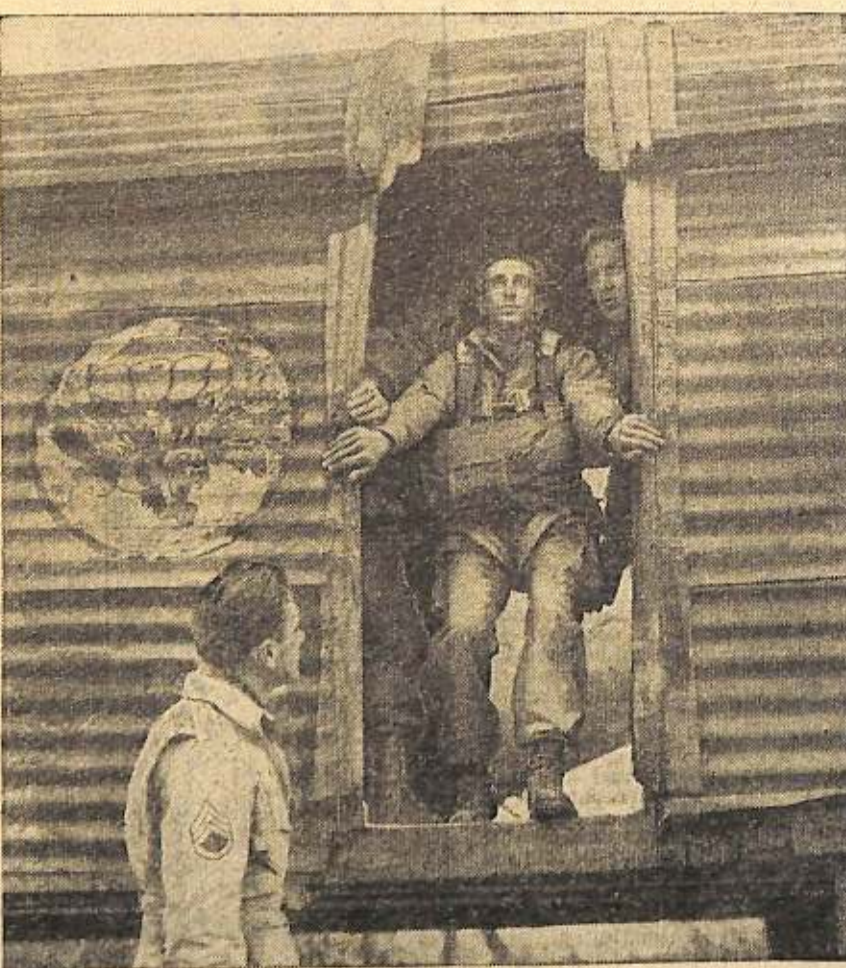
Give them confidence in the strength of Thine everlasting arms to uphold them. Endow them with clean minds and clear hearts that they may participate worthily in the victory which this nation must achieve in Thy name and through Thy will.

Make them hardy soldiers of our country as well as of Thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.



Cpl. Jim Flanagan shows Pvt. Clifton Kerr, of Grand Rapids, Ohio, who is slung in a mock chute harness, what goes where and why.



Pvt. Paul J. Bruscato, of Munroe, La., assumes the jump position watched by S/Sgt. Dragos. Cpl. Bill Cheney peers over his left shoulder.

