

# Operation Varsity: Airborne Artillery in the Rhine Crossing

## Introduction

The Rhine River has always been a major obstacle for armies trying to invade Germany from the west. In World War II, the Allies planned a massive airborne assault to cross the river and establish a bridgehead on the east bank. This operation, code-named Varsity, was one of the largest airborne assaults in history.

Operation Varsity was part of a larger Allied offensive to cross the Rhine and push into the heart of Germany. The operation was planned by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the Allied ground forces commander. Montgomery believed that an airborne assault across the Rhine would be the key to breaking the German

defenses and opening the way for the Allied armies to advance into Germany.

The airborne assault was carried out by the 17th Airborne Division, which was made up of the 513th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and the 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. The 464th was the first artillery battalion to be dropped by parachute into combat.

The airborne assault began on March 24, 1945, when over 17,000 paratroopers and glider troops were dropped behind enemy lines near Wesel, Germany. The paratroopers and glider troops quickly secured a bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine, and the 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion began firing on German positions.

The German forces were caught off guard by the airborne assault, and they were unable to prevent the Allies from establishing a bridgehead on the east bank

of the Rhine. The Allied forces were then able to cross the river in force and push into the heart of Germany.

Operation Varsity was a success, and it played a major role in the Allied victory in World War II. The operation showed that airborne forces could be used to cross major obstacles and establish bridgeheads behind enemy lines. Operation Varsity also showed that artillery could be effectively used in airborne operations.

The 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for its actions in Operation Varsity. The battalion was also awarded the French Croix de Guerre.

The story of the 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion is a story of courage, determination, and sacrifice. The battalion's actions in Operation Varsity helped to pave the way for the Allied victory in World War II.

## Book Description

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This book tells the story of the 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion in Operation Varsity. It is a story of courage, determination, and sacrifice. It is a story that has never been told before.

# Chapter 1: Airborne Assault

## Planning and Preparation

Operation Varsity was one of the most ambitious airborne operations in history. It involved over 17,000 paratroopers and glider troops, as well as hundreds of aircraft. The planning for the operation began months in advance, and it involved every level of the Allied command structure.

The first step in planning for Operation Varsity was to select the drop zones. The drop zones were chosen based on their proximity to the Rhine River and their defensibility. The Allies also wanted to drop their paratroopers and glider troops in areas that were not heavily defended by German forces.

Once the drop zones had been selected, the Allies began to develop a plan for the assault. The plan included the timing of the drops, the routes that the paratroopers

and glider troops would take, and the objectives that they would be assigned.

The Allies also spent a great deal of time training for the operation. The paratroopers and glider troops practiced jumping from aircraft and landing in combat zones. They also trained on the weapons and equipment that they would be using in the operation.

The planning and preparation for Operation Varsity was a massive undertaking. However, it was essential to the success of the operation. The Allies' careful planning and preparation allowed them to achieve their objectives and secure a bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine River.



# Chapter 1: Airborne Assault

## The Paratroopers

The paratroopers of the 17th Airborne Division were some of the most elite soldiers in the United States Army. They were volunteers who had undergone rigorous training to prepare them for the rigors of combat.

The paratroopers were equipped with a variety of weapons, including rifles, machine guns, and mortars. They also carried parachutes, which allowed them to jump from airplanes and land behind enemy lines.

The paratroopers of the 17th Airborne Division played a vital role in Operation Varsity. They were the first troops to land on the east bank of the Rhine River, and they quickly secured a bridgehead that allowed the rest of the Allied forces to cross the river.

The paratroopers fought bravely against the German forces, and they played a major role in the Allied

victory in Operation Varsity. Their courage and determination helped to pave the way for the Allied victory in World War II.

Here are some of the stories of the paratroopers who fought in Operation Varsity:

- **Private First Class John R. Towle** was a paratrooper in the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was one of the first paratroopers to land on the east bank of the Rhine River. Towle fought bravely against the German forces, and he was awarded the Silver Star for his actions.
- **Staff Sergeant William F. Foley** was a paratrooper in the 513th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was one of the paratroopers who helped to secure the bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine River. Foley fought bravely against the German forces, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions.

- **Lieutenant Colonel James M. Gavin** was the commander of the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was one of the most experienced paratroopers in the United States Army. Gavin led his regiment with distinction in Operation Varsity, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions.

The paratroopers of the 17th Airborne Division were some of the most courageous and determined soldiers in the United States Army. Their actions in Operation Varsity helped to pave the way for the Allied victory in World War II.

# Chapter 1: Airborne Assault

## The Gliders

The gliders used in Operation Varsity were Waco CG-4A Hadrian gliders. These gliders were made of wood and fabric and were designed to carry up to 13 troops or 3,200 pounds of cargo. The gliders were towed behind C-47 Skytrain transport planes.

The gliders played a vital role in Operation Varsity. They were used to transport troops and equipment to the drop zone near Wesel, Germany. The gliders were also used to evacuate wounded soldiers from the battlefield.

The glider pilots were highly skilled and experienced. They had to be able to fly the gliders in formation and to land them safely on the drop zone. The glider pilots also had to be prepared to fight if they were attacked by enemy aircraft or ground forces.

The gliders faced a number of challenges during Operation Varsity. The weather was bad, and the gliders were often forced to fly through heavy clouds and rain. The gliders were also attacked by enemy aircraft and ground forces. Despite these challenges, the glider pilots were able to deliver their troops and equipment to the drop zone safely.

The gliders played a vital role in the success of Operation Varsity. They allowed the Allies to transport troops and equipment to the drop zone quickly and efficiently. The gliders also helped to evacuate wounded soldiers from the battlefield. The glider pilots were highly skilled and experienced, and they played a key role in the success of the operation.

The Waco CG-4A Hadrian glider was a versatile and effective aircraft. It was used in a variety of roles during World War II, including troop transport, cargo transport, and medical evacuation. The glider was also used in the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

The Waco CG-4A Hadrian glider is a testament to the ingenuity and skill of the American engineers and pilots who developed and flew it. The glider played a vital role in the success of Operation Varsity and other Allied operations during World War II.

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

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