



# **A Paratrooper's Panoramic View: Training with the 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion for Operation Varsity's 'Rhine Jump' with the 17th Airborne Division**

*Philip Wilson*

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At 10:00 AM on March 24, 1945, a literal "sky train" of two and one-half hours in length flew in 226 C-47 and 72 C-46 transport planes carrying 17,122 paratroopers together with 906 gliders being pulled by 610 C-47 tow planes. Paratrooper Robert L. Wilson jumped from the lead serial of planes in this largest airborne assault in military history. He landed in the designated drop zone near Wesel. There, with others in "Branigan's Bastard Battalion," - the 464th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion - he made history as part of the first artillery airborne outfit to land, reassemble, and fire their howitzer's east of the Rhine River. Field Marshall Montgomery, who had elaborately orchestrated this airborne assault, gathered Prime Minister Churchill together with Generals Eisenhower, Ridgway, and Breton on the western bank of the Rhine to watch the air spectacle unfold. The objectives of this airborne assault - Operation Varsity - were achieved predominantly through the efforts of the U.S. 17th and British 6th Airborne Divisions. These troopers closed in along the Rhine all along its length to prevent any German stronghold from being secured on its bank. They later thrust across Germany's northern plains en route to Berlin. In sum, Varsity's success accelerated the Nazi collapse. A Paratrooper's Panoramic View provides readers a historical perspective of Varsity from one of the Operation's participants. In it, Wilson vividly recounts the attractions of the airborne during the early days of Army parachute training. From entering Ft. Benning's Parachute School in 1943, to Camp Mackall, to Europe's "Cigarette Camps," to the Marshalling Area in Chalons-sur-Marne, France, in March 1945, this book closely follows the preparations that guided this trooper towards the "Rhine Jump."

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