D-Day with the Screaming Eagles

George Koskimaki
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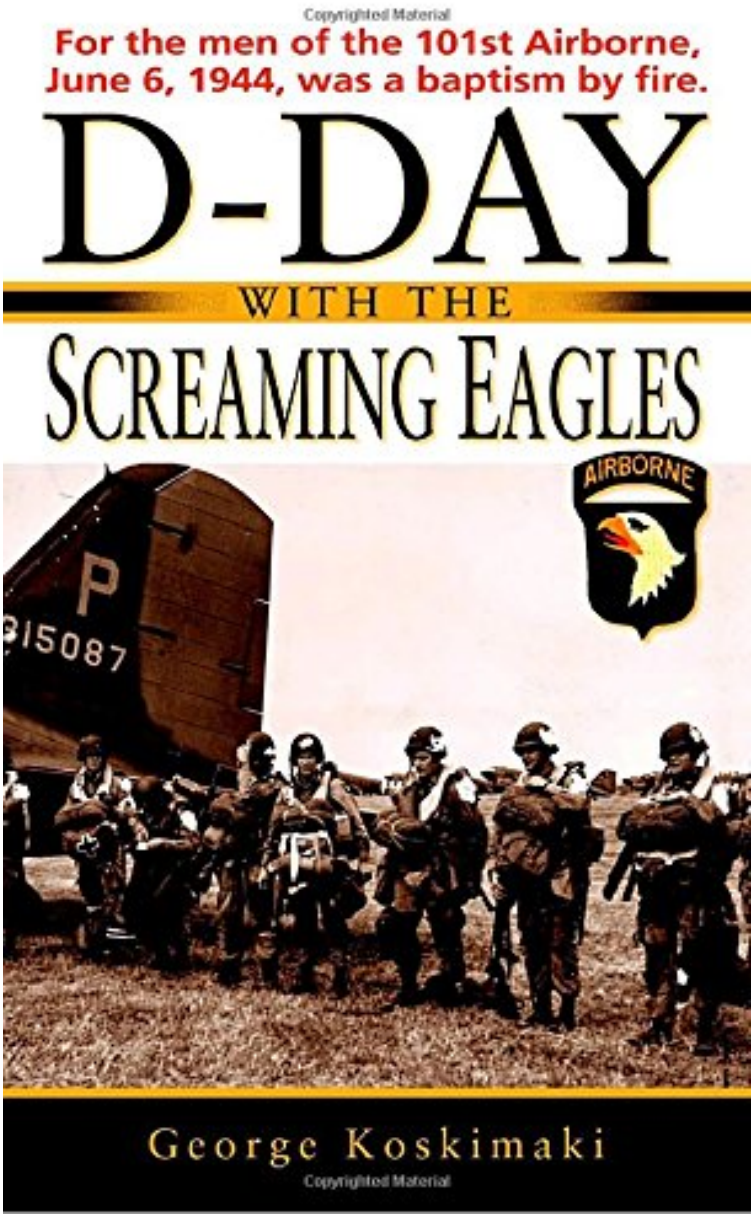

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George Koskimaki : D-Day with the Screaming Eagles before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised D-Day with the Screaming Eagles:

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little known (to me) but very brave paratroopers who were the first to land on French soil in the moonlit early morning of D-Day via their parachutes. Many died during their jumps, yet many more lived and proceeded on their various missions on that historic day: all with the goal to stop German reinforcements from arriving on the beaches.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It was the greatest generation to ever live and there isn't many aliveBy Patricia A. McgrathAs a family member my interest is about this war. My grandfather served in Europe while my Dad and uncles served in the Pacific. It was the greatest generation to ever live and there isn't many alive. So we must remember or the world will forget1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Think you had a BAD DAY?By barryThis is the Greatest Generation in operation.Take a deep breath jump out of an aircraft speeding through the night at 400 feet over enemy territory into a maelstrom of tracer shells coming from the people trying their best to kill you. Then see how things go after you get to the ground.(some of these men still walk among us).

“A TRULY AMAZING COMPENDIUM.”–Gerald J. Higgins, major general, U.S. Army (ret.), from the ForewordIn the predawn darkness of D-Day, an elite fighting force struck the first blows against Hitler’s Fortress Europe. Braving a hail of enemy gunfire and mortars, bold invaders from the sky descended into the hedgerow country and swarmed the meadows of Normandy. Some would live, some would die, but all would fight with the guts and determination that made them the most famous U.S. Army division in World War II: the 101st Airborne “Screaming Eagles.”George Koskimaki was part of the 101st Airborne’s daring parachute landing into occupied France that day. Now, drawing on more than five hundred firsthand accounts–including the never-before-published experiences of the trailblazing pathfinders and glider men–Koskimaki re-creates those critical hours in all their ferocity and terror. Told by those who ultimately prevailed–ordinary Americans who faced an extraordinary challenge–D-Day with the Screaming Eagles is the real history of that climactic struggle beyond the beachhead.

“…thoroughly engrossing and readable account…. I couldn't put it down… an account of the events of the day from the men that were actually there…. The extraordinary actions, the sadness, the humor, the loss....and what they gained as a result of being there. Highly recommended.” (Model Armour.com)“…gives you the feel that you are there during the frenzied first hours of the invasion. Detailed accounts of the activities of the pathfinders were enthralling…The coverage of the glider units landing later during the D-day is information rarely covered in other books. Familiar stories like Lt Dick Winters lading troops taking out guns on Normandy are shared with a freshness that predates band of Brothers by twenty five years.” (Kepler’s Military History)“…descriptions of the experiences and actions of the actual participants, and that’s what is really most valuable about this book. The men themselves essentially wrote it for each other and their posterity. ..anyone with interest in World War II, D-Day, the 101st, airborne operations, or military history in general would do well to read this book, and it is highly recommended…with this reviewer’s grateful thanks to the author for this first hand look into part of one of the more storied combat operations of WWII.” (Journal of America’s Military Past)About the AuthorGeorge Koskimaki (1922–2016), a noted historian of the 101st Airborne Division, is the author of D-Day with the Screaming Eagles, Hell's Highway, and The Battered Bastards of Bastogne.Excerpt. Chapter 1 The Marshaling AreaThe training period had come to an end for the Screaming Eagles. The rumor mills had been busy for weeks grinding out the endless chain of reports concerning the imminence of departure for the marshaling areas. The experiences were not new for the men in that all units had participated in several dress rehearsals culminating with Exercise Eagle during the period of May 11–14. The sky troopers had emplaned from the same airfields to which they were now being sent. During the last week of May, orders were received restricting the men to their unit areas. They packed their personal belongings, were assigned parachutes, refitted with some new equipment, and packed their equipment bundles.Lieutenant Richard Winters served as executive officer of his unit on D-Day. He wrote:1 “Leaving Aldbourne was a tough job. A fellow couldn’t say a thing to anybody due to security. The English knew we were pushing off. When I went to say good-bye, as if I was off for another maneuver, it got me to see them cry and take it as they did.”Technician 5th Grade Bill Finn, a D-Day communications wireman said, “When we were leaving the company area for the marshaling area, most of the people living in the homes surrounding Donnington Castle were out in the street to wave good-bye to us and wish us luck. They probably didn’t know the day we would leave England but they sure knew we wouldn’t be back for some time.”An intelligence soldier, PFC Richard M. Ladd wrote, “Regimental Headquarters Company of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment was loaded aboard British buses May 30, 1944, at Chilton-Foliat, Berkshire, England, and driven perhaps 15 miles to Greenham Common Airdrome, where we were quartered until the evening of June 5 in a tent city. The area was enclosed with barbed wire and termed a marshaling area. No one, other than a few high ranking officers, was ever allowed to leave this area until the evening of June 5, when we boarded C-47’s for France.” Corroborating that statement, Sergeant Louis Truax said, “Our marshaling area was near Exeter, England, and was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by army troops not of our division. They had machine guns at the corners of the area and we were forbidden to talk to the guards.”Captain Charles O. Van Gorder was a member of the 3rd Auxiliary Surgical Group and had volunteered for the assignment to go in on D-Day with the 101st Airborne Division. His group had previously participated in the campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy prior to arriving in England.

The detached service with the 101st Division was in the form of an experiment to find out if it would be any advantage to take a surgical team in where the casualties were, rather than to take the casualties back to where the evacuation hospitals were located.The eight men who volunteered for this mission called themselves the 1st Airborne Surgical Team and they were attached to the 326th Airborne Medical Company. Van Gorder provided his recollections of the marshaling area with these comments: “Several days before D-Day, we were sent with part of the 101st Airborne Division to Aldermaston Air Field for staging and briefing. These were very trying days to remain crowded in a large hangar, going out in only small groups at intervals for chow. Latrines were in or somewhere under the roof of the hangars. Keeping us in the hangar and going out in small groups was to frustrate any enemy aerial reconnaissance.”An enlisted man who was in the same area was PFC George S. Schulist, who was a jeep driver for his platoon leader. His memories of the same staging area include these items: “When we went to eat at the mess hall, we were always taken in groups, such as Battery A or Battery B. When we left the hangar, we had to pass the fence gates. Plainclothesmen were waiting on the other side of the gate to escort us to the mess hall. They were there so we could not talk to anyone outside of our groups at the marshaling area.”The primary reason for placing the men in solitude much like imprisoned men was the briefing for the invasion. With firsthand knowledge of the D-Day targets and objectives, the men were kept isolated to prevent any leaks to the enemy. Some of the men who prepared the briefing aids have good descriptions of these preparations.PFC Richard M. Ladd of the 502nd intelligence group described, “Regimental S-2 Section was one of the few groups that actually had duties to perform while in the marshaling area. This consisted of building crude tables with wooden sides. Sand was then shoveled into these boxes from some trucks that were driven in. From these crude beginnings, we began our sand tables which were located in each battalion area. On these were developed models from soap and other suitable materials to simulate houses, churches, etc., with paints and some coloring to simulate the general reliefs of the area in Normandy in which we were to jump. Each table was a bit different, in that, it contained different roads and hamlets peculiar to each battalion’s S-2 Section. We constructed these sand tables as accurately as we could from the latest aerial serial photographs supplied to us by the Air Force, to coordinate and orient them with wonderfully accurate British defense maps, as well as all the latest information supplied to us by various intelligence agencies, including the latest up-to-date ‘poop’ from the French underground Maquis.”Ladd added, “After these tables were prepared and the various companies were broken down into platoons, the leaders and sergeants would be briefed in front of the tables as to their objectives, the terrain, directions of the roads, and a general familiarization of their target areas. Each unit would retire to tents and company streets to study maps that had been disseminated to them, and proceed to discuss, argue, and speculate the assigned squads and personnel for specific jobs to be accomplished. Then various trips were made back to the sand tables for restudy by the officers and noncoms.”A former member of the regimental demolitions section, Corporal Vinnie Utz, had been transferred to the intelligence section of the 506th Regiment for the Normandy operation. He recalled, “The S-2 Section made the sand tables for the invasion and we assisted the officers in going over the objectives, company by company. I was put into a complete German uniform by Colonel Robert Sink and told to visit all the line company tents so they could get a good idea of what a Kraut looked like.”An assistant operations officer for the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, Captain William E. Brubaker, stated, “I recall my part (and the entire S-3 Section) in preparing for the mission. We had plotted the location for the three firing batteries and spent several days in planning targets and computing the firing data for each target. The balance of our time was spent in briefing the rest of the battalion from sand tables and maps. I remember receiving very fine aerial pictures on a daily basis showing our main targets and objectives, and how delighted I was when we discovered that the Air Force had practically eliminated one of the coastal batteries we were to take.”Recollections of the detailed map reading provides some interesting information. Engineer Lieutenant Harold Young said, “Every officer had maps at a scale of 1:10,000 plus oblique air photos of our landing and target positions. Every G.I. had a map at 1:300,000 of the whole general area. We had our men memorize a section of the map so they could get back if they landed in the wrong place. It was said that every private in a parachute unit knew as much as a colonel in a regular infantry outfit.”After the intelligence personnel had briefed the regimental and battalion staff officers and their men, the briefings continued down through the company commander, the platoon leader, the squad leader, and down to the last private—or almost, as we shall see later.The commanding officer of the 501st Regiment’s Charley Company, Captain Robert H. Phillips, described the painstaking preparation: “Several days were devoted by the unit commanders, of which I was one, studying our assignments and formulating detailed plans for carrying them out. Each individual member was then thoroughly briefed on the detailed plans of his particular unit. Only general information was given as to the missions of the division.“My company’s mission was to seize and secure the road junction south of St. Come-du-Mont, a small village, thus securing a flank of the drop zone (DZ). This position also overlooked the main highway bridge north of Carentan, and later gained the name of ‘Dead Man’s Corner.’ ”A platoon leader with Able Company of the same regiment, Lieutenant Sumpter Blackmon, recalled, “The intensive sand table briefing we received and gave to our sergeants and to the other men lasted for about a week. The mission for my platoon was to take and hold the La Barquette Locks on the Douve River about a mile north of Carentan. The remainder of the 1st Battalion was to blow the bridges over the river to the northwest of Carentan.”Minute details were not forgotten. Sergeant Pat Lindsay, mortarman with the same company,

said, “I remember the sand table work in which each man knew definitely which job he was to do, even down to the direction in which the foxholes would be dug.”Part of the briefing included familiarizing the men with the enemy uniforms. Private Robert “Lightnin” Hayes had this recollection to add: “I remember the day we were assembled in a tent for the first time and an officer told us where we were going to jump. He then paused to watch our reactions. There was a sand table near by with a facsimile of the terrain on which we were going to drop. There were two dummies standing near the sand table. One was wearing a German Air Force uniform while the other was dressed in the black uniform of the Armored Corps. I tried on the black beret to see how it would fit me. I didn’t realize that a few days later I would meet a German face-to-face wearing one of those caps.”Reconnaissance photography had been so detailed that individual enemy soldiers appeared in recent pictures taken of the objectives. An airborne engineer, PFC John G. Kutz, whose assignment was to be the preparation for destruction of two wooden bridges northeast of Carentan, was briefed with aerial photos of the bridges. He said, “On one photograph you could see a German guard standing against one of the bridges. It seemed he was trying to hide from the low- flying plane.” Kutz felt he had already met the enemy!Two of the men called to mind that they had not received briefings with the rest. Captain Raymond S. “Chappie” Hall, Protestant Chaplain of the 502nd Regiment, said, “I never had time for the briefings and didn’t even know the password when it was given nor was I issued a metal clicker.”A communications soldier with the 2nd Battalion of the 501st Regiment, T/5 Harry T. Mole, Jr., walked around the tented area and watched the men of Dog, Easy, and Fox Companies getting their equipment ready. He made this observation: “I watched them as they repeatedly cleaned their rifles over and over again. I watched these men as they sat on boxes and had their hair cut off Indian fashion. I didn’t have mine cut. I watched men in circles intently listening to an officer describe their objectives. Their eyes followed every line scratched in the dirt by a stick attached to the officer who was explaining their mission. The invasion was becoming real now. Training could possibly be called over. This was the time they had trained for. Me? Nobody briefed me. I wandered around the area watching the others learn their objectives. How envious I was of the line company men. They knew what it was all about. They belonged.“My machine gun platoon and our 81mm Mortar Platoon of Headquarters Company belonged. They were assigned to various line companies and were being briefed by them. Each man in my communications platoon had an assignment except me. I was technically a battalion code clerk, a Technician 5th Grade, a rather unimportant role in an invasion of this magnitude. They also gave me an SCR-536, press-to- talk radio probably because they had one left over. As a code clerk, I had a machine to code and decode messages coming to and going from battalion headquarters. Cloak and dagger, eh! One thing was wrong—they never told me what the code was!”