

Glider Infantry

The paratroopers and glider infantry were the first to arrive in Normandy shortly after midnight on D-Day. While the parachutists were scattered all over the Cotentin Peninsula, the glider troops, riding together in their powerless aircraft, went into action in the groups with which they had trained—if they survived the landing. Thomas Edward Goodson, Jr. was a first lieutenant assigned to the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment of the famed 82nd Airborne Division. Unlike many of his comrades who arrived in Normandy under cover of darkness, Goodson would arrive in daylight, facing fully alert German defenders as well as Normandy's distinctive hedgerows.

Goodson, a member of Clemson's Class of 1940, was from Hartsville. He started his collegiate career at The Citadel, then transferred to Clemson to pursue an architecture major. He apparently did so successfully, for he was selected for membership in the Minarets, the architecture honor fraternity. He associated with the other boys from the Pee Dee basin as a member of the Peedeeans, and he was also a member of Blue Key honor society. In the Cadet Brigade, Goodson served as a second lieutenant during his senior year.

After finishing Clemson, Goodson worked with Hardy Oliver, a Columbia architect. In January 1942, Goodson entered the service and in June, he married Norma Niggeim of Columbia.

Goodson was assigned to the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. The 401st trained at Fort Bragg, North Carolina until July 1943 when it moved to the New York port of embarkation. The regiment sailed aboard the HMS *Strathnaver* and landed at Liverpool, England in the summer of 1943. The 401st established its training camp at Reading, about 35 miles west of London.

In March 1944, the 401st was broken up. Goodson's battalion was transferred to the 82nd Airborne Division and reclassified as the 3rd Battalion of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment. Along with its two



Glider infantry troops of the 82nd Airborne Division prepare to board gliders for the D-Day invasion.

parachute infantry regiments, the 82nd planned to deliver 12,000 soldiers into Normandy to support the ground forces coming in across the invasion beaches.

The 82nd's initial nighttime landings of the glider troops resulted in very high casualties. Sixteen percent of the glider troops were killed, wounded, or missing—even before they reached combat. The Norman hedgerows, overlooked by Allied planners, amounted to deadly landing obstacles at the edges of every field. One bomber pilot, returning from an early morning D-Day mission, looked down to see scattered “parachutes, and pieces of crashed gliders. I don’t believe I saw an undamaged one.”

Even the daylight landings, like the one which delivered First Lieutenant Goodson, had trouble with the hedgerows. Goodson landed on June 7, D+1, but most fields were simply too short. Gliders would touch down and then slide right into the thick, six-foot high hedges, ripping apart the flimsy wooden aircraft—and too often the men inside.

A week into the invasion, the hedgerows continued to plague the Allies. The Germans used the hedges and the sunken farm lanes behind them as defensive trenches from which to contest the American advance. The 325th was advancing one field at a time as it was forced to root out the well-covered German defenders. At 1000 hours on the morning of June 14, D+8, Goodson’s battalion led an attack toward Etienneville, approximately 6 miles west of Sainte-Mere-Eglise. At this point, First Lieutenant Goodson had taken over command of Company G. With support from a company of tanks from the 746th Tank Battalion, the glider troops were able, in a day-long fight, to drive the enemy forces out. In this action, Goodson was killed.

The airborne secured the flanks of the Allied landings, seizing the causeways that led inland and preventing the Germans from moving reinforcements to the beaches. The airborne troops’ overall casualty rate, at 10 percent, was far lower than Supreme Commander Eisenhower’s air chief had predicted. The success of the invasion owes not a small debt to the intrepid parachutists and glider infantry.

First Lieutenant Thomas Edward Goodson, Jr. was survived by his wife, his parents, and two sisters. After the war, his remains were returned to Hartsville and buried in the Magnolia Cemetery.



See also *D-Day June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* by Stephen Ambrose, 1994