

## **Henry Major Taylor was the first Clemson soldier to fall on D-Day.**

Henry Major Taylor, from Greenwood, SC, was older than most of the men in his artillery unit. Taylor had entered Clemson in the fall of 1934 as a textiles major in the Class of '38, but he probably didn't return to school after his freshman year. By 1944, Taylor would have been in his late 20s, an 'old man' when compared to the average enlisted infantrymen. Even though he was older than the average private, Taylor volunteered for the airborne, serving with one of America's most famous divisions, the 82<sup>nd</sup> 'All American' Airborne.

The invasion of Europe was already underway when Taylor and his comrades boarded their Waco glider on the morning of June 6, 1944. The first planes ferrying the paratroopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to battle had departed their airfields before midnight the previous day. On this cool morning, support troops, like Taylor's 320<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Glider Battalion, were being thrown into the life-or-death struggle raging in Normandy.

The 105 mm howitzers of Taylor's battalion were towed into battle not by truck, but by C-47 Dakota transport aircraft tugging boxy-looking Waco gliders. As the 320<sup>th</sup> lifted off from its airfields in England, Allied forces were struggling to secure their precarious beachheads on the French coast and the airborne divisions, including the 82<sup>nd</sup>, were battling behind German lines as they fought to control vital causeways leading inland from the contested beaches.

The 320<sup>th</sup> glided into battle shortly after 1 pm. Poor visibility and low clouds made air navigation extremely difficult. Severe German small arms and mortar fire added to the challenge. As a result, gliders were badly scattered for miles along the drop zone. Many crash landed and casualties were high. It is likely that Taylor was one of those killed when his glider landed near the embattled crossroads village Ste-Mere-Eglise.

D-Day was, of course, a great military triumph for the Allies, paving the way for the eventual invasion of Germany from the west. But it was a victory purchased with heavy sacrifices by men from many nations. Henry Major Taylor was one of those who helped earn the ultimate Allied victory through his ultimate sacrifice.