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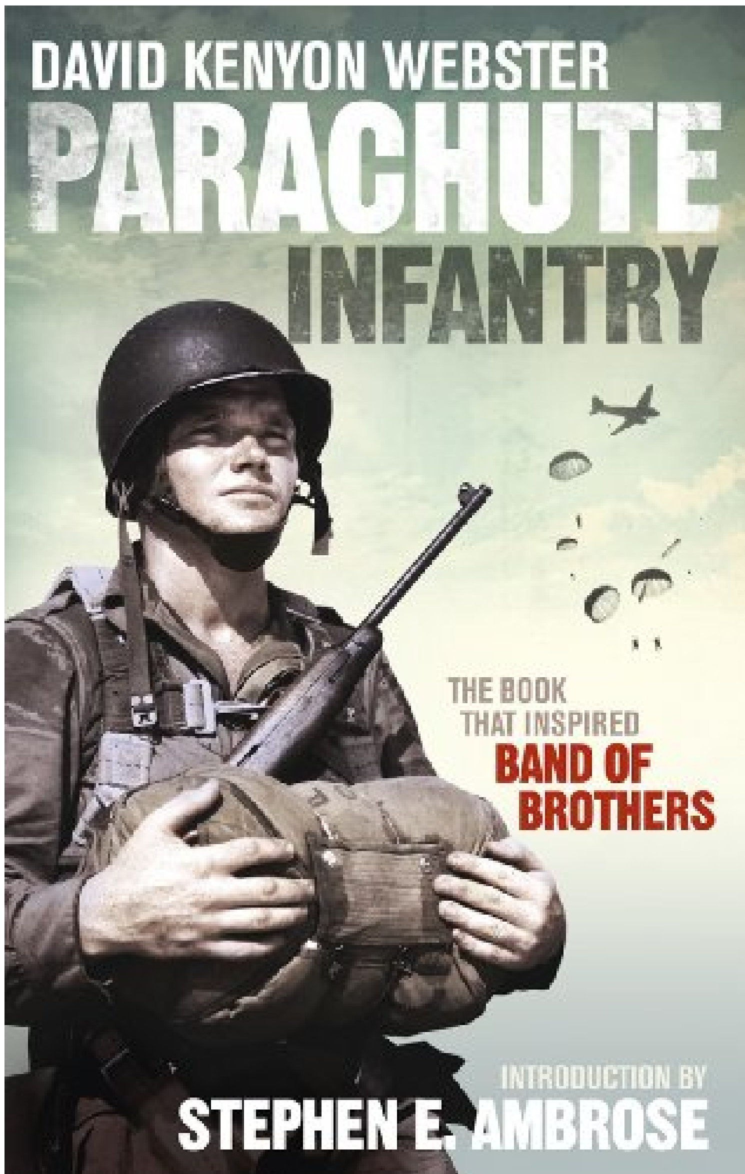
Parachute Infantry: The book that inspired Band of Brothers



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Par David Webster : Parachute Infantry: The book that inspired Band of Brothers before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Parachute Infantry: The book that inspired Band of Brothers:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurParatrooper David Kenyon Webster jumped into the chaos of occupied Europe on D-Day, fighting his way through Holland and finally capturing Hitlers Eagles Nest. He was the only member of Easy Company to write down his experiences as soon as he came home from war.Webster records with visceral and sometimes brutal detail what it is like to take a bullet in the leg, to fight pitched battles capturing enemy towns, and to endure long periods of boredom punctuated by sudden moments of terror.

But most of all, Parachute Infantry shows how a group of comrades entered the furnace of war and came out brothers.ExtraitIt was the end of May, 1944. We had been in England eight months while others fought, and now our time had come. A last inspection, a last short-arm; clean the barracks and police the area. Every man gets a new jumpsuit and an orange smoke grenade. We move out at noon.O.K., let's go. Mount the buses and say goodbye to the village of Aldbourne, to its green hills and mossy barns and thatched cottages, to the white pubs, the brown cow-pond, the old gray church. A V sign, a wave of the hand, a friendly smile for the two bakers and Barney and Ma and the crippled man who drags a child's cart, collecting cans for the scrap-metal drive. No more London, no more mild-and-bitter, no more field problems or playground jumps.We were hot and crowded on the ride south but not unaware of the beauty around us, a beauty made more lovely by the knowledge that many of us would never see it again. Loaded with gear and ammunition and sweating terribly in woolen winter uniforms, we drove under the tall green trees south of camp, past Wittenditch and the back hill to Ramsbury, past the cozy tea room at Chilton Foliat and the water meadow and cattail bog that fronted on the pink, Elizabethan magnificence of Littlecote Manor, home of the legendary wild Darrells and more recently of our regimental commander, Colonel Robert F. Sink.We crossed the Kennet River on an arched stone bridge, made a sharp left turn at the Froxfield-Littlecote intersection, and rolled through Hungerford to the Great Western Railroad station on the outskirts, where we must have waited for hours. At least it seemed like hours, for the sun was so hot, our gear so tight, our clothes so airless and itchy. Gradually the talk died down and more and more men lay back on their musette bags and fell asleep. Tension passed into boredom.It was supposed to be a secret that we were setting off for the Invasion of Europe, but the secret was hard to keep from passersby. Our fresh bandoleers, new ammunition pouches, and full musette bags; the camouflage netting on our helmets; the bundles of orange cloth and identification panels that almost every man carried; the trench knives sewn on our boots; the tense, excited way we talked.I, however, was still skeptical, for I had imagined that our last move would be at least as well disguised as our arrival in Aldbourne. It would be proper, correct, and traditional, I thought, to fade away from Aldbourne on a cold, dark night in a sealed convoy. After all we had been told about security, it seemed foolish to move us out so openly for D-Day at hot high noon. I looked at the orange cloth and the orange smoke grenades and loudly proclaimed, "Hell, this is just another goddamn maneuver. This time we're the orange team."Our train slid in and stopped. We piled aboard, a squad of twelve to each compartment designed for six civilians, threw our excess gear on the floor, and put the machine guns and mortars in the luggage racks overhead and the musette bags under the seats. Down came the broad leather window straps and with them the windows, and soon everybody had settled back quietly with his thoughts and his memories and forebodings to rest awhile and enjoy the trip.Fast and smooth we rode, shot through the green landscape in our sealed tube, as if we were trying to make up for all our waiting. We rattled south and west, through pocket villages and little towns we'd never heard of before. Through Pewsey and Westbury and Bruton and Cas Cory, Yeovil and Axminster. Through tunnels and across rivers that would be brooks and creeks in our own land (the Avon, the Wylye, the Stour, the Frome, the Axe). As we got sleepier and sleepier, we came nearer the Channel and saw scores of overgrown 1940 pillboxes, their sagging barbed wire draped with wild vines."Tweet, tweet!" our engine shrilled as we rattled through the stations without a pause. "D-Day calling," the wheels replied, "D-Day calling, D-Day calling, D-Day calling."We dozed or talked softly, smoked or looked out the windows, opened our K rations and ate them. The hills got bigger and greener, with great, shadowy belts of trees on their tops, and the train increased its speed. Whistling shrilly at tunnels that blew soot back at us through the open windows, it carried us like a tidal wave toward the dark shore of combat for which we had been so long preparing. On and on, "D-Day calling, D-Day calling, D-Day calling."At twilight time, we rattled into a village way station and stopped. Men got out of the forward cars, cursing and banging their gear, and soon an officer shouted in our window, "Everybody outside! This is it."We untangled our harness and twisted into it and fell out on the platform, rubbing our eyes in the sudden glare. honiton, a sign said.We looked around and saw a little brown hamlet poured unevenly down steep cobblestone streets. Not a civilian was in sight. It was so utterly deserted that it reminded me of Las Vegas at nine in the morning.Machine guns and mortars on our shoulders, we staggered up a steep incline, turned a corner, climbed aboard a column of trucks waiting for us with tailgates down and motors running, and drove slowly out of town."Where are we going?" someone asked our driver."To this airfield five miles out.""Oh . . ."And that was that.The long brown convoy snaked and whined and grated uphill with dryly shifting gears on a narrow, dusty road. Higher and higher we went, until at last we reached the topmost plateau, a man-made butte for runways. We stopped in a country lane bordered by stout

hedgerows sweet with honeysuckle.I looked over the tailgate and saw a half-timbered cottage down the way and a line of green pyramidal tents on the other side of the north hedge and suddenly recognized the place. We had bivouacked here before the last night jump a few weeks ago. It was simply a bivouac area then and a very good one, but nothing more. Now it was the marshaling area.Entertainers and newsmen on deadline can talk all they want to about tension, but they wouldn't know tension if you dipped it in a bucket of water and hit them in the face with itunless they had spent five days in a marshaling area, waiting to start the Invasion of Europe.The only comparable sensation would be those last five days in the death house, when everybody is quiet and considerate and they feed you well and let you sleep late and write letters and give you little favors and comforts. The chaplain comes around to see you, the warden makes a speech, and maybe you write a letter to your mother.If you have a mother and she still cares.Or you write your girlfriend, who is probably going steady with somebody else by now, as ours were.Finally there isn't anything more to do. You eat your last meal and put on your clothes and walk down the corridor to the big flash. You go out of the world the way you came in: surrounded by people and utterly alone.That's the way it was in the marshaling area.Ours included both the runways from which the C-47s and gliders were to take off and the tent cities pitched on their outskirts for the accommodation of waiting parachutists and glidermen. Troops were assembled here for greater control, absolute secrecy, and more intimate instruction in the tasks before them. They were briefed and issued maps and whatever special equipment or ammunition was necessary to complete their wardrobe. They loaded the bellies and doorways of C-47s with parapaks of bandoleers, mortar shells, and machine-gun ammunition, with K rations and D rations, medical supplies, and 75mm pack howitzers. Jeeps, trailers, and fully assembled 105s were lashed down in British Horsa and American CG4A gliders. Nobody visited other companies, nobody left the area for a mild-and-bitter. We walked in the shadows of the hedgerows and amused ourselves without the Red Cross or the U.S.O.Since S.H.A.E.F., or something equally academic and Olympian, feared the consequences of German observation planes noticing new paths beaten across the meadows to the slit trenches, we were ordered to follow the U-shape of the hedges to the latrine, instead of cutting straight across. S.H.A.E.F. never explained how the Luftwaffe could miss hundreds of planes and gliders and scores of tents and still pick up a threadlike Indian trail through foot-long grass. But then, S.H.A.E.F. never explained a lot of things.The trucks drove away and left us in the peaceful silence of a country twilight. The sun was fading, swallows glided home, and still we stood, hot, tired, sooty, and churlish. Our O.D.s itched. We were bleary from naps on the train and dusty from the truck ride. The snaps on our musette bags bit and twisted into our collarbones. Be done with it, be done with it! our patience cried. We've hurried up and waited for two long years. Now let's go!"Is the coffee ready yet?" someone called in a loud voice to our right. A cuckoo whispered down the lane by the timbered cottage, and there was a clatter of pans out of sight behind the north hedge. Its wings and fuselage marked with broad white identification bands, a great, brown C-47 rustled over us with its flaps down and glided to a landing out of sight several hundred yards away.Our captain, who had disappeared through an opening in the hedge, popped up again and took a stand on a mound in the opening. "On your feet, Headquarters Company!" he shouted. "Let's go!"The food situation was incredible. No sooner had we relaxed on our camp cots in squad tents as close and hot as New York in August than a shrill cry of "Chow!" brought us out on the path with a clatter of utensils. Friendly, obliging Air Corps K.P.s loaded our tin dishes like garbage scows. It was a beautiful load: white bread (our first overseas), great gobs of melting butter, marmalade from an open keg swarming with yellowjackets, rice pudding and cream, all the coffee you can drink."Seconds? Why sure, help yourself, buddy.""You're kidding?""No, no, we got orders to give you guys all you want."The millennium had arrived.While we were smoking and chatting and thinking about thirds in the hushed, drowsy lull afterward, the C.Q. put his head in the tent flaps and shouted something about a movie in fifteen minutes.A rumor, we said. White bread and movies on the same day? Impossible.But this was the marshaling area, where Air Corps engineers did all the chores and nothing was too good for paratroopers, so movies it was.They were held in the base theater near the runways half a mile away, with the whole Regiment in attendance. The atmosphere was more like a cruise to Bermuda or a high-school graduation party than a prelude to Invasion. Friends shouted to friends in other companies and battalions; officers visited back and forth; Colonel Sink stood benignly up front like a headmaster, smiling at his boys, or people, as he called us.The movie started with a Gothic title starkly emblazoned on a gigantic swastika. This was soundly hissed. The camera lowered its focus to a battalion commander below the swastika who was addressing his men in frantic, Hitlerian fashion from a platform in a hangar. He wore a parachutist's rimless bowl helmet and a long, spotted jump jacket. His pants were perfectly bloused over his boots. The sound

track, which was in German, carried his guttural ravings to us. We hissed again and again.When his speech was over, his men leaped to their feet, shot their right arms in the air, and shouted, "Heil Hitler!" Then they turned and trotted out to the planes.Their mission, a narrator explained in English, was to seize and hold a bridge at Moerdyk, Holland, until an S.S. panzer division broke through and relieved them. We followed their progress closely, for the picture, like everything that had to do with foreign paratroopers, was fascinating.The Germans adjusted their chutes and piled into their corrugated-iron JU-187s, which resembled the old Ford trimotors. As they climbed through the door, they waved to the cameraman and smiled with bravado, but they weren't fooling anybody. They were scared. We could see the fear in their eyes.We saw it in their faces, too, when they stood up and hooked up, and in the jumpmaster's mouth as he leaned out the door and checked the country below for landmarks.Suddenly he nudged the second man and pointed down. "There it is! There it is!" he seemed to say.A wide river and a long black bridge rode slowly into view far below.The Germans started jumping when the plane was on the other side of the river. Jumping, did I say? They swan-dived, spread their arms and sailed out like divers off a high board. We roared with laughter. It was a ludicrous sight.They were less amusing on the ground. As the chutes floated down so soft and white and pretty, the Germans went into action. They ripped off their harness and ran fast across the flat meadows toward a village near the bridge. They were determined men who carried their machine pistols and machine guns as if they fully intended to use them. Dodging into holes and ditches and running madly from tree to tree and house to house, they showed a perfect knowledge of the theory of war and its practical application.Soon the Germans had cleared the village, blasted the pillboxes at the bridge approaches, and captured some rather sheepish, obviously rehearsed Dutch soldiers in medieval black helmets. Then they dug in.The Dutch counterattacked. Mortars burst on the houses and around the Germans' holes and thundered black and heavy on the bridge, but the invaders held. Finally the S.S. rattled across the river in black tanks. The paratroopers jumped wildly out of their holes and hugged them, and the picture was over. It ended as it had begun: with a swastika.We thought of those burly German paratroopers in the long silence before the lights came on again and wondered if they would be waiting for us wherever we were going. Sensing our subdued mood, Colonel Sink got up and made a little speech that I will reproduce as best I can."Men," he said, wiping his face with his hand, "we've shown you this picture because we wanted you to see how the Germans fight. "Did you watch them closely? Did you see how fast they moved? How they used every bit of the available cover and concealment? Remember those things when you go into combat.Revue de presse"Gutsy, sometimes bemused and sometimes angry it bites and hangs on" (New York Times)"[A] first-rate, skillfully written soldier's story" (Booklist)"Beautifully written and perfectly evokes life and battle in a parachute infantry company" (Washinton Post)"He understood the ties that bind men in battle have more to do with brotherhood and its obligations than ties to God or country" (Kirkus)"Perfectly pitched ... an authentic witness to the combat experience" (Booklist)