

PROVISIONAL RANGER GROUP (6/1-6/6, 1944)

MATERIAL CULTURE GUIDE No. 1 - OPERATION OVERLORD



There is confusion amongst the living history community regarding the uniforms and equipment used by Rangers during Operation Overlord. Faulty documentation and unchecked research have resulted in incorrect conclusions regarding lack of wear of the fatigue uniform by the 2nd and 5th Ranger battalions during Operation Overlord. This unsubstantiated research and resulting theories need to be dispelled as the primary resource material for both Battalions exists and is plentiful. Using those primary sources, this article seeks to dispel common myths and present a comprehensive gathering of photos, video stills and veteran testimony to clearly illustrate the uniforms and equipment of the Provisional Ranger Group on D-Day.

It is also important to emphasize the Provisional Ranger Group and how it functioned. The 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalion was a singular unit, functioning as task forces, under the Provisional Ranger Group during Overlord. Command, intelligence and supply were shared in preparation for the invasion. The idea of two separate, autonomously functioning Battalions on D-Day is a fallacy.

TASK FORCE BREAKDOWN:

Provisional Ranger Group (Overall Cmdg. Lt. Col. Rudder, Exec. Maj Sullivan)

Task Force 'A' was assigned to Pointe du Hoc (Lt. Col. Rudder)

Task Force 'B' was assigned to Pointe et Raz de la Percee (Capt. Goranson)

Task Force 'C' was assigned to Omaha Beach (Lt. Col. Schneider)



For the purposes of this article, there will be a singular focus on enlisted personnel and non-commissioned officers. Commissioned officers show great individuality in kit, and thus would need to be discussed on a named, individual basis.

MATERIAL CULTURE OBSERVATIONS:

NCO-ISSUED EQUIPMENT (BINOCULARS & LENSATIC COMPASSES)

Virtually every NCO wears a lensatic compass pouch (20 with pouch, per TO&E) and binoculars (22 with case, per TO&E). It is important to note that the actual wear of these items is near universal, with the compass pouch generally being worn on the front of the cartridge belt and the cased binoculars on the rear of the cartridge belt. This can be documented as early as training exercises in Bude, England months before the invasion. Wirecutters (68 with pouch, per TO&E) are also incredibly common with perhaps 50% or more Rangers seen wearing them

COMPANY LEVEL SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

TO&E specified Company-level items such as machetes (8 per company, per TO&E) and hatchets (1 per TO&E) are clearly visible and issued, seemingly, in quantity specified by TO&E.

M1943 ENTRENCHING TOOLS

With the exception of Officers, the M1943 entrenching tool cannot be documented to any Provisional Ranger enlisted men during Overlord. Officers appear to have been largely issued folding shovels, and in many cases they are cut-down while enlisted men are generally equipped with the M1910 entrenching tool or pick mattock.

SHORTENED ENTRENCHING TOOLS

Shortened M1910 entrenching tools, albeit uncommon, are visible in some stills and can be attributed to both the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions. This is a rarity but notable.

FOUL WEATHER GEAR AS ISSUED TO RANGERS FOR OPERATION OVERLORD

Both Capt. John Raaen (5/HQ) and Capt. Charles Parker (5/A) make note of foul weather gear in the form of raincoats issued alongside "ponchos" and "cape-like" things". Photographic evidence shows

that British “gas capes” were issued in lieu of raincoats in some cases. It is difficult to tell what the ratio was, as Raaen states that raingear was ordered to be worn in the haversack.

“But we had raincoats. Some of the raincoats would be cape-like things. This was a guarantee that everything below the rim was going to be sopping wet because the rain would run off that thing.”

- 1 Lt. Charles Parker, 5/A

There is no evidence to support that the ponchos being mentioned are issue as US ponchos which began arriving in theater in August, 1944. Research gathered from the Army Quartermaster Museum at Ft. Lee by Joshua Kerner substantiates that date as well as verifies the issue of British capes to American troops before D-Day.

It is possible that the issue ponchos arrived with the Provisional Ranger Group well after Operation Overlord, and could account for some mention of them in writings. However, for the purposes of a D-Day interpretation it is clear that the poncho would not have been in use.

GENERAL PURPOSE BAGS

Nearly every Ranger in video footage and photographs can be seen wearing M1936 general purpose bags (86 per TO&E). Oddly, no ‘matched’ straps are to be found (3 allotted per TO&E for Officers). Rather, the “GP bag” can be seen worn with shelter rope or with 1” web straps akin to litter straps, carried loosely as a form of satchel or even clipped to the rear of the haversack. The TO&E also notes the issue of these bags to all enlisted Rangers....but no straps. This is an important indicator that equipment was issued true to TO&E recommendations for Operation Overlord.



M1936 PACK SYSTEMS

M1936 pack systems are entirely rare and can only be seen on one Ranger. They should not be worn for a Provisional Ranger Group impression.

RANGER FOOTWEAR

The only group ordered to wear paratrooper boots was ‘D’ Co., 2nd Rangers at Pointe du Hoc, and 1/Sgt. Leonard Lommel is purported to have made this statement in several interviews. The balance of 2nd and the 5th Ranger Battalion wore a healthy mix of shoes with cut-down leggings and paratrooper boots.

“I wore Paratrooper boots on D-Day at Pointe du Hoc. We got them some time before D-Day and I got them in England. We did not wear spats over our trousers tucked into them...some guys didn’t wear them on D-Day in case they damaged them. The 1st battalion wore the smaller boots with spats. They used to cut them down to make long-distance hiking easier. So from that day on we all cut down our leggings and that caused some confusion as some were not wearing (paratrooper) boots.”

- T/4 Frank E. South 2/HQ

“THE BATTLE DRESS WAS AN IMPREGNATED, OLIVE DRAB FATIGUE-TYPE UNIFORM”

The wool uniform was not worn by either Battalion of the Provisional Ranger Group during Overlord. In some very rare cases, a wool shirt is visible as a bottom layer and can be seen underneath the fatigue jacket and field jacket. With the mass amount of video footage and photographs available, this can only be documented to three individuals.

“There were no showers aboard ship, so the men really got to stinking. This was compounded by the waxy chemical water repellent impregnated into the uniforms and equipment of the men. The men wore standard issue fatigues. The Army went “knife-happy”...Rangers had their standard trench knife, the Ranger daggers presented by the British Commandos, bayonets, and switchblade pocket knives made available..had ‘mae west’ preserver [belts], gas masks, load carrying equipment, all the ammunition...desired beyond the basic load. [Weast carried] one belt and two bandoleers of rifle ammunition amounting to 20 clips of 8 rounds each. [Weast] opted for more, so he carried a total of 4 bandoleers of ammo, plus what was stuffed in the belt. [Weast] was armed with an M1 Rifle... and carried 4 rifle grenade, with two being high explosive types and two white phosphorous types. [Weast carried] one block of nitrostach explosives..used condoms to protect small items from the surf...”



5th Ranger Infantrymen loading LCAs enroute to troop ships in Weymouth, June 1, 1944. Note the wear of fatigues, a mixture of jump boots and cut-down leggings with shoes, and TO&E specified gear including wirecutters, general purpose bags and binoculars on the rear of the NCO's cartridge belts as told by Hathaway.

Critical Past

assigned to carry a spare 81mm High Explosive (HE mortar round.) [Weast] attended religious services with Father Lacy...the last meal aboard ship consisting of fried eggs and fresh steak."

- PFC. Carl Weast, 5/B

"The battle dress was an impregnated, olive drab fatigue-type uniform. The cloth was stiff and smelled from the impregnation that was designed to reduce chemical warfare casualties should the Germans use toxic chemicals."

- Capt. John C. Raen, 5/HQ

"I think we were wearing our fatigues, but I couldn't swear that we weren't wearing our OD's. Regardless, I'm sure I had a light field jacket, probably the fatigues, we all had paratroop boots in the Rangers, and so this is what I was starting out with. My personal equipment that I carried as the Section Sergeant, I carried an M-1 rifle, so I wore a rifle belt with all of the ammunition for the M-1. I had binoculars, I had wire-cutters on the belt. I might add that I strung my binoculars on the back in-between the pouches of M-1 ammunition rather than carrying it on a strap over my shoulder. I had the wire cutters attached on one pouch. I had a grenade launcher in a pouch hanging on the belt. I had my canteen on my belt. I had a compass on my belt. I had the first aid pouch on the belt. We had fighting knives. I always wore my fighting knife on my trousers' belt rather than on my rifle belt. And I had a bayonet, I'm sure, but that went on the pack. We were carrying light packs,

as I recall, without our bedrolls. This is the basic equipment I was carrying, anyway. (I missed mentioning a most important tool-a shovel for digging slit trenches!) We did have to take gas masks, and we had those, and as we started out then-I might say that we had 17-jewel Hamilton watches issued to each man, and we had switchblade paratroop knives that would flip the blade open at the touch of a button."

- Sgt. Victor J. "Baseplate" Miller, 5/E

MODIFIED FATIGUE POCKETS

Some Rangers are observed with modified pockets on their fatigues. These modifications can be seen in video footage and photos and are far from simplistic, which more than likely establishes that the impregnated fatigues had been received well before the invasion. There are several modifications that can be documented, however its unknown as to how common this was. This practice can be attributed to both the 2nd and 5th Rangers.

"We had extra pockets going down the side of our fatigue pants. The Paratroopers had them. We copied them. They had a big pocket that went from their knee to above their hip, divided into two sections. We had gotten extra material and had sewn pockets down the side, or hired people to do it. Some guys did it for a fee. It enabled us

to carry more things.”
- 1 Lt. Robert Edlin, 2/A



5th Rangers aboard LCAs in Weymouth. Note fatigues with extra, larger pocket sewn below the regular pocket. This fits Lt. Edlin's description to the detail.
Critical Past

HOW FATIGUES WERE WORN

Footage of Rangers on the Prince Baudouin shows the proper wear of the uniform as long underwear underneath gas impregnated fatigues with the field jacket worn atop. In some footage, one can clearly

make out a “jersey” collar underneath the fatigue jacket, further confirming the wear of winter weight underwear and complete lack of wool uniform.

BAR BELTS USED FOR ALTERNATE RIFLES

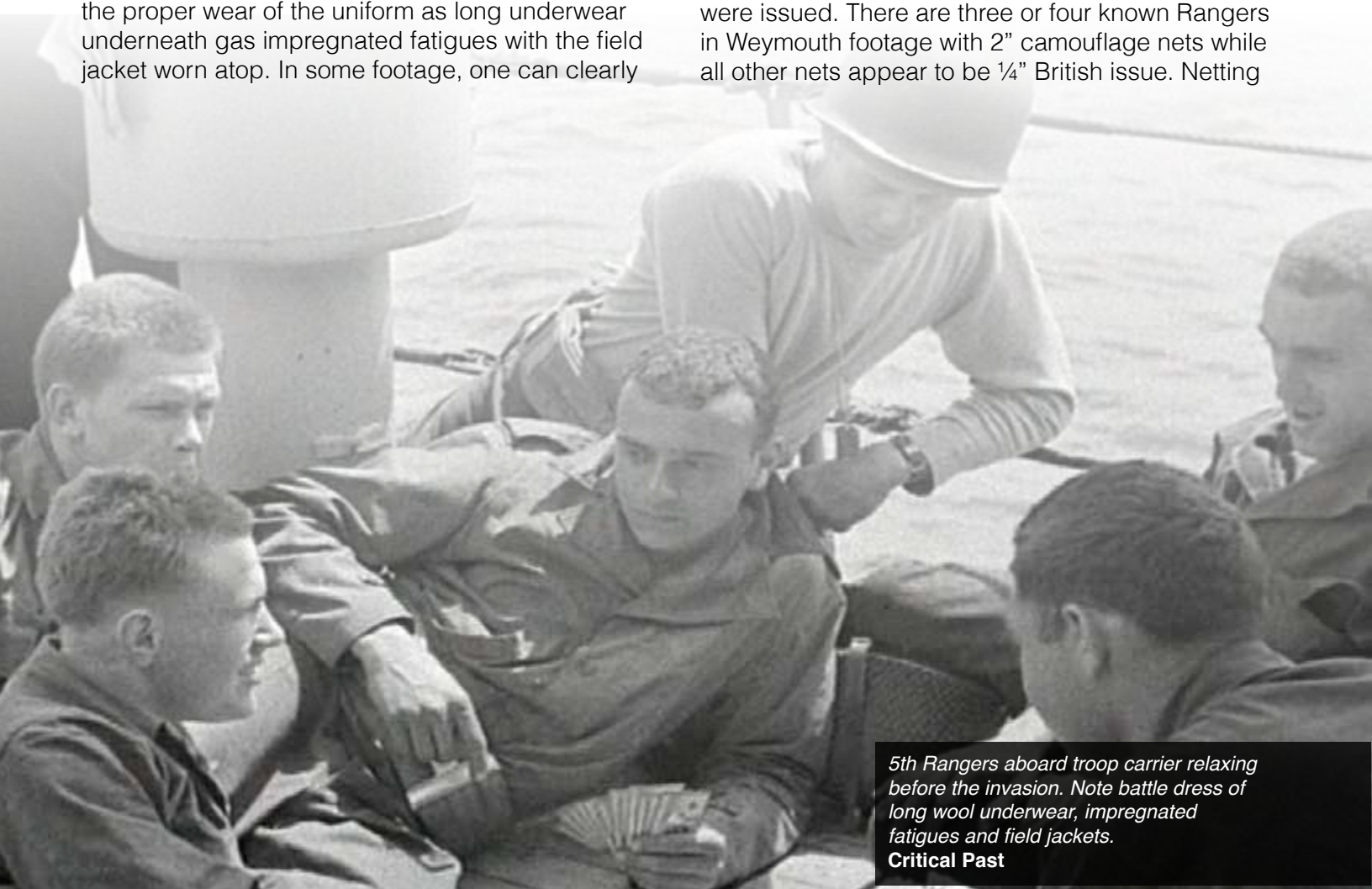
There is a noteworthy trend among Task Force “C” 2nd Rangers, particularly Officers, in the use of the BAR ammunition belt. This is generally paired with the M1 Carbine and is seen among 15-20 Rangers in Task Force “C”.

RIFLE SLINGS

The web M1 sling is far more common than the M1907 sling, with the latter being barely used. We observe roughly 10 canvas slings to 1 leather.

HELMET NETTING

Helmet netting is sparse and with the exception of 1 or 2 individuals is the ¼ British variety, appearing to be both the woven and knotted type. Netting is more common in the 5th Battalion, in general, than in the 2nd. There appears to be no standard as to how they were issued. There are three or four known Rangers in Weymouth footage with 2” camouflage nets while all other nets appear to be ¼” British issue. Netting



5th Rangers aboard troop carrier relaxing before the invasion. Note battle dress of long wool underwear, impregnated fatigues and field jackets.
Critical Past

appears to be acquired at Company level, and as such should be researched and employed only in that manner.

SPARE AMMUNITION BAG

Although uncommon, it is worth noting the spare ammunition bag (generally associated with submachine guns) can sometimes be seen worn in lieu of the General Purpose Bag by riflemen and automatic riflemen.

ASSAULT JACKETS

In general, the assault jacket is more common amongst the 2nd Ranger Battalion. It borders on scarce amongst the 5th Ranger Battalion, and can only be documented to a small handful of officers. The assault jacket is far more common in the 2nd amongst officers and, oddly, T/5's. We estimate 10% of the 5th Ranger Battalion and 25% of the 2nd Ranger Battalion used them. It should be noted that the haversack is the common, issue pack. The few quotes made about the Assault Jacket are, not surprisingly, fairly negative.

"Unlike the normal packs most men had with shoulder straps, I had one that buckled up the front and back. It was made of cloth and had all kinds of pockets. I had that thing

stuffed with extra rations, enough D bars...to go a month, dried food and extra ammunition. I knew I had to get out of that darn thing because it was making me a good target... thoughts went through my had that if I had been wearing a regular pack, it would have been a lot easier to get out of. "

- 1 Lt. Charles Parker, 5/A

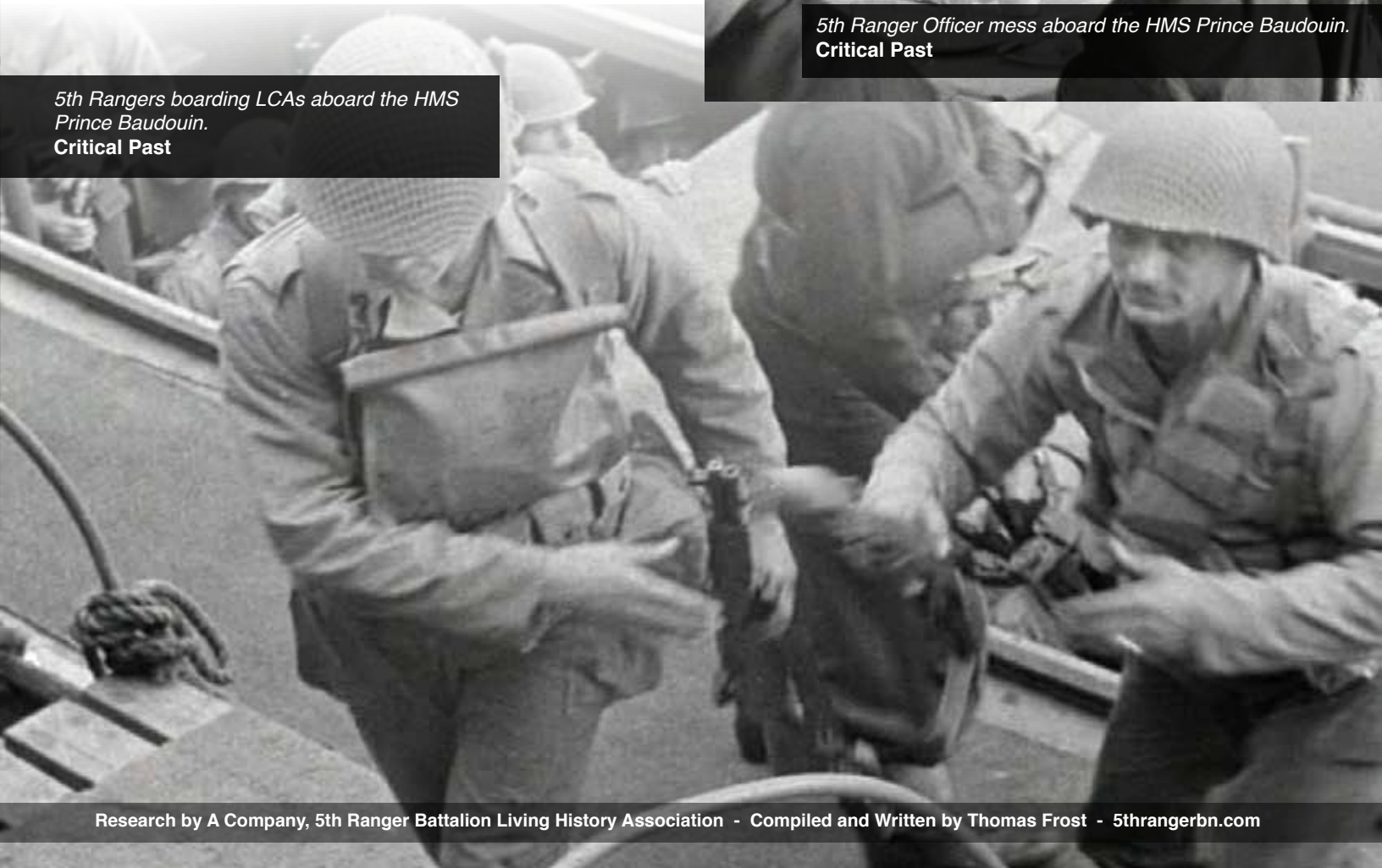
FIELD JACKETS

The common field jacket is the Jacket, Field OD, otherwise known as the "M1941 field jacket." This jacket can be seen on all enlisted personnel in photographs and videos, with one notable "Parsons" jacket visible in a 5th Ranger Battalion photograph. Winter Combat "Tanker" jackets can only be documented, and with strong numbers, being worn by commissioned officers.



**5th Ranger Officer mess aboard the HMS Prince Baudouin.
Critical Past**

**5th Rangers boarding LCAs aboard the HMS Prince Baudouin.
Critical Past**



5th RANGER BATTALION (TASK FORCE 'C') - RIFLEMAN (PFC.)

PLATE BY ABLE COMPANY, 5th RANGER BATTALION LIVING HISTORY ASSOCIATION



Headgear:

- 1 – M1 helmet fixed bail (Tom Frost) with Liner, high pressure (Tom Frost/JMurray Inc. 1944)
- 1 – ¼" helmet net (Original)
- 1 – Knit wool cap (WWII Impressions)

Uniform:

- 1 – Field jacket OD, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Ranger lozenge sleeve insignia (WWII Supply Room)
- 1 – Fatigue jacket (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Wool olive shade winter undershirt (Original)*
- 1 – Wool olive shade winter drawers (Original)
- 1 – Fatigue trousers (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Enlisted trouser belt
- 1 – Paratrooper boots (Corcoran)
- 1 – Raincoat (worn in Haversack)

Fieldgear:

- 1 – M1923 cartridge belt (At the Front)
- 1 – M1924 first aid pouch (At the Front) with dressing (original)
- 1 – M1910 canteen and cup (Original) with cover (At the Front)
- 1 – M1936 general purpose bag (American Patrol Co.) with improvised cotton rope strap
- 1 – M1936 wirecutters (Original) with pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M1928 British-made haversack (At the Front)
- 1 – M1910 entrenching tool (At the Front) with cover (Harrison Tent & Awning)

Specialized Invasion Equipment:

- 1 – M1926 life preserver (Original)
- 1 – Airborne-type rubberized first aid pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M7 gas mask carrier (At the Front), containing:
 - 1 – M5 gas mask (Original M9, retrofit)
 - 1 – Gas cape (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Gas shields (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Anti-dim cloths (in tin – Original)
 - 1 – Hose clamp set (sealed – Original)
 - 1 – Gas detection sleeve brassard (WWII Supply Room)

Weapons:

- 1 – M1 Rifle with "lock-bar" sites and M1 web sling (Original)
- 1 – M7 grenade launcher (Original)
- 1 – M1 Bayonet, 10" (Original)
- 1 – M2 Parachutist knife (What Price Glory)
- 1 – M3 Knife (At the Front) with M8 scabbard (Original)
- 1 – Fairburne Sykes dagger (Original) with scabbard



5th RANGER BATTALION (TASK FORCE 'C') - NCO (Sgt.-S/Sgt.)

PLATE BY ABLE COMPANY, 5th RANGER BATTALION LIVING HISTORY ASSOCIATION



Headgear:

- 1 – M1 helmet fixed bail (Tom Frost) with Liner, high pressure (Tom Frost/JMurray Inc. 1944)
- 1 – ¼" helmet net (Original)
- 1 – Knit wool cap (WWII Impressions)

Uniform:

- 1 – Field jacket OD, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Ranger lozenge sleeve insignia (WWII Supply Room)
- 1 – Fatigue jacket (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Wool olive shade winter undershirt (Original)*
- 1 – Wool olive shade winter drawers (Original)
- 1 – Fatigue trousers (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Enlisted trouser belt
- 1 – Paratrooper boots (Corcoran)
- 1 – Raincoat (worn in Haversack)

Fieldgear:

- 1 – M1923 cartridge belt (At the Front)
- 1 – M1924 first aid pouch (At the Front) with dressing (original)
- 1 – M1910 canteen and cup (Original) with cover (At the Front)
- 1 – M1936 general purpose bag (American Patrol Co.) with improvised cotton rope strap
- 1 – M1936 wirecutters (Original) with pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M1928 British-made haversack (At the Front)
- 1 – M1910 entrenching tool (At the Front) with cover (Harrison Tent & Awning)

- 1 – Lensatic Compass with Pouch (American Patrol Company)
- 1 – Binoculars (Original) with Case (What Price Glory)

Specialized Invasion Equipment:

- 1 – M1926 life preserver (Original)
- 1 – Airborne-type rubberized first aid pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M7 gas mask carrier (At the Front), containing:
 - 1 – M5 gas mask (Original M9, retrofit)
 - 1 – Gas cape (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Gas shields (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Anti-dim cloths (in tin – Original)
 - 1 – Hose clamp set (sealed – Original)
 - 1 – Gas detection sleeve brassard (WWII Supply Room)

Weapons:

- 1 – M1 Rifle with "lock-bar" sites and M1 web sling (Original)
- 1 – M7 grenade launcher (Original)
- 1 – M1 Bayonet, 10" (Original)
- 1 – M2 Parachutist knife (What Price Glory)
- 1 – M3 Knife (At the Front) with M8 scabbard (Original)
- 1 – Fairburne Sykes dagger (Original) with scabbard



2nd RANGER BATTALION (TASK FORCE 'A, B & C') - RIFLEMAN (PFC.)

PLATE BY ABLE COMPANY, 5th RANGER BATTALION LIVING HISTORY ASSOCIATION



Headgear:

- 1 – M1 helmet fixed bail (Tom Frost) with Liner, high pressure (Tom Frost/JMurray Inc. 1944)
- 1 – Knit wool cap (WWII Impressions)

Uniform:

- 1 – Field jacket OD, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Ranger lozenge sleeve insignia (WWII Supply Room)
- 1 – Fatigue jacket (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Wool mixed-gray shade winter undershirt (Original)*
- 1 – Wool olive shade winter drawers (Original)
- 1 – Fatigue trousers (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Enlisted trouser belt
- 1 – Reverse-upper service shoes, Impregnated (SM Wholesale)
- 1 – Raincoat (worn in Haversack)

Fieldgear:

- 1 – M1923 cartridge belt (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1924 first aid pouch (At the Front) with dressing (original)
- 1 – M1910 canteen and cup (Original) with cover (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1936 general purpose bag (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1936 wirecutters (Original) with pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M1928 haversack (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1910 entrenching tool (At the Front) with cover (WWII Impressions)

Specialized Invasion Equipment:

- 1 – M1926 life preserver (Original)
- 1 – Airborne-type rubberized first aid pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M7 gas mask carrier (At the Front), containing:
 - 1 – M5 gas mask (Original)
 - 1 – Gas cape (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Gas shields (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Anti-dim cloths (in tin – Original)
 - 1 – Hose clamp set (sealed – Original)
 - 1 – Gas detection sleeve brassard (WWII Supply Room)

Weapons:

- 1 – M1 Rifle with “lock-bar” sites and M1907 sling (SM Wholesale)
- 1 – M1 Bayonet, 10” (Original)
- 1 – M2 Parachutist knife (What Price Glory)
- 1 – M3 Knife (At the Front) with M8 scabbard (Original)
- 1 – Fairburne Sykes dagger (Original) with scabbard



2nd Rangers boarding in Weymouth.
Critical Past

2nd RANGER BATTALION (TASK FORCE 'A, B & C') - NCO (Sgt.-S/Sgt.)

PLATE BY ABLE COMPANY, 5th RANGER BATTALION LIVING HISTORY ASSOCIATION



Headgear:

- 1 – M1 helmet fixed bail (Tom Frost) with Liner, high pressure (Tom Frost/JMurray Inc. 1944)
- 1 – Knit wool cap (WWII Impressions)

Uniform:

- 1 – Field jacket OD, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Ranger lozenge sleeve insignia (WWII Supply Room)
- 1 – Fatigue jacket (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Wool mixed-gray shade winter undershirt (Original)*
- 1 – Wool olive shade winter drawers (Original)
- 1 – Fatigue trousers (dark), M1942, Impregnated (At the Front)
- 1 – Enlisted trouser belt
- 1 – Reverse-upper service shoes, Impregnated (SM Wholesale)
- 1 – Raincoat (worn in Haversack)
- 1 – Brown leather civilian gloves (seen in footage)

Fieldgear:

- 1 – M1923 cartridge belt (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1924 first aid pouch (At the Front) with dressing (original)
- 1 – M1910 canteen and cup (Original) with cover (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1936 general purpose bag (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1936 wirecutters (Original) with pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M1928 haversack (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – M1910 entrenching tool (At the Front) with cover (WWII Impressions)

- 1 – Lensatic Compass with Pouch (WWII Impressions)
- 1 – Binoculars (Original) with Case (What Price Glory)

Specialized Invasion Equipment:

- 1 – M1926 life preserver (Original)
- 1 – Airborne-type rubberized first aid pouch (At the Front)
- 1 – M7 gas mask carrier (At the Front), containing:
 - 1 – M5 gas mask (Original)
 - 1 – Gas cape (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Gas shields (sealed - Original)
 - 1 – Anti-dim cloths (in tin – Original)
 - 1 – Hose clamp set (sealed – Original)
 - 1 – Gas detection sleeve brassard (WWII Supply Room)

Weapons:

- 1 – M1 Rifle with “lock-bar” sites and M1907 sling (SM Wholesale)
- 1 – M1 Bayonet, 10” (Original)
- 1 – M2 Parachutist knife (What Price Glory)
- 1 – M3 Knife (At the Front) with M8 scabbard (Original)
- 1 – Fairburne Sykes dagger (Original) with scabbard



2nd Rangers boarding in Weymouth.
Critical Past

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