

PMM BLOG ARCHIVE

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Remembering D-Day: Two Pennsylvanians' Stories

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)

*Staff Sergeant Joseph Poplawski*



Photo of Poplawski.

Staff Sergeant Joseph Poplawski of Scranton, PA, entered the Army in 1942. While Poplawski was in training at Camp Wheeler, GA, he was given the choice to train as a paratrooper, drive truck, or wash dishes. He chose to become a paratrooper. He jumped with the 82nd Airborne Division, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

According to family oral history, he boarded his C-47 transport between 11PM & 12AM in England and jumped around 2 AM, landing near St. Marie Eglise, France - 15 miles from his drop zone. He remained in Normandy as part of Operation Overlord for 37 days, at one point standing neck deep in water for two days to avoid detection. In mid-July his unit was pulled out and returned to England for rest and relaxation. Out of 2,000 men in his unit, only 500 remained fit for duty after their ordeal.



Photo of Poplawski's M1942 Jacket.

To make his D-Day jump, Poplawski wore an M1942 Paratrooper's jacket. It's designed with a series of long vertical pleats down the back that allowed the uniform to expand when the trooper needed to move his arms, and a belted waist to prevent it from billowing outward during jumps. The M1942 paratrooper's jacket was only produced by the Army for a short time, as its cotton twill construction was not heavy enough to endure the rigors of combat.

Poplawski was redeployed to France on Christmas Day 1944 to counterattack the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge. He made nine more successful parachute jumps and was honorably discharged on November 19, 1945.

*Staff Sergeant Donald Engle Clark*

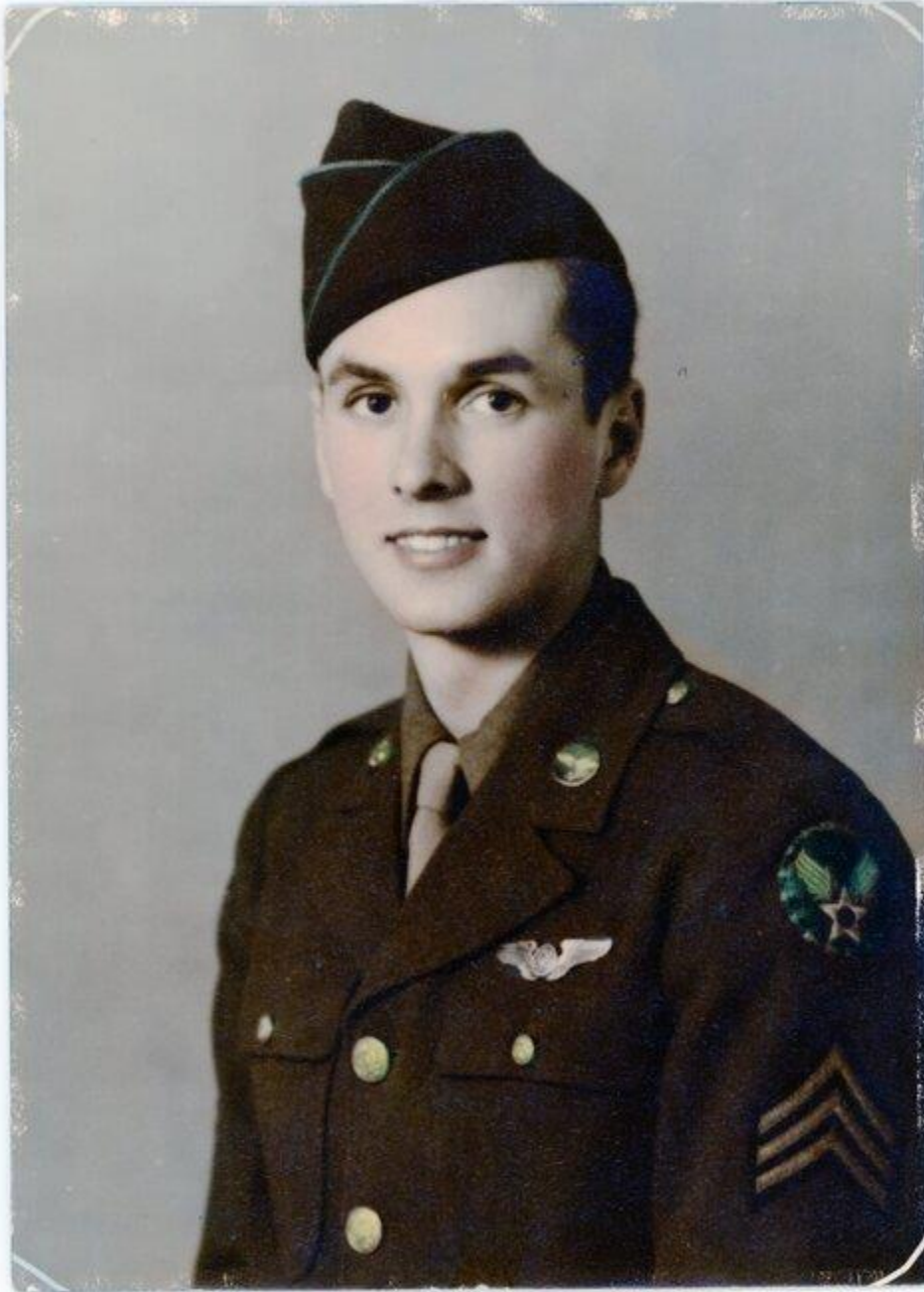


Photo of Clark.

Donald Engle Clark of Ardmore, PA was inducted in the Army in 1943. Staff Sergeant Clark trained as an airplane mechanic and aerial gunner aboard a B-26 Marauder medium bomber. Between March and October 1944, he flew 66 missions over Europe as part of the European Air Offensive and Operation Overlord (Battle of Normandy). According to family history, Clark was in nine plane crashes but never injured. He got sick on every mission he flew and joked that he was the only American to have "thrown up" on every occupied country in Europe.



Photo of Clark's leather bomber jacket.

His brown leather bomber jacket, issued to flight crewmen, is stenciled over the left breast in yellow with an image of ten rows of five bombs. The bombs signify the number of missions (50) Clark had flown at the time.

In addition to the European Air Offensive and Operation Overlord, Donald Clark participated in campaigns in Northern France to drive Germans from the area, and in the Rhineland as German forces retreated across the Rhine River. He was honorably discharged on September 14, 1945.

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