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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 506TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY (101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN THE NORMANDY INVASION, 5-8 JUNE 1944 (NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Regimental Staff Officer)

Type of operation described: AIRBORNE INFANTRY REGIMENT IN AN ASSAULT LANDING TO SUPPORT AN AMPHIBIOUS LANDING

Major Salve H. Matheson, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

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S-3 Statement of Captain Ronald C. Speirs, Infantry, former Platoon Leader, Co. D, 506th Parachute Infantry

S-4 Statement of Lt. Co. Clarence Hester, Infantry Reserve, former S-3, 2d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry

PK Personal Knowledge

EW Eye Witness

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 506TH PARACHUTE
INFANTRY (101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, in the NORMANDY INVASION from 5 June to 8 June 1944. The operations of the regiment are typical of those performed by other parachute regiments participating in the operation. Its leadership was excellent, precombat training intensive, its troops imbued with the necessity for the success of their mission, and esprit de corps high. (1)

OPERATION NEPTUNE
(See Map I)

OPERATION NEPTUNE was the code name applied to the specific operation, assault areas, and target date for the Allied cross channel attack in 1944. Seizure of the COTENTIN PENINSULA and the port of CHERBOURG was of vital importance to the success of the operation. One of the factors dominating the planning was the need of a port. When the additional resources were provided, the plan was widened to include the CONTENTIN beaches.(2) The general plan now provided for assault by the British Second Army on three beaches near CAEN, by the American First Army on two beaches, named UTAH and OMAHA to the east. The US V Corps was to land on OMAHA BEACH, and the US VII Corps on UTAH BEACH. (3)

Troops and logistical support were built up in ENGLAND for the campaign designed to establish the bridgehead into EUROPE. It was determined to employ the US 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions in rear

(1) PK
(2) A-1, p.1
(3) A-1, p.3

of UTAH BEACH, and portions of the British 6th Airborne Division on the east of the British beachhead areas. (4) (5) The objectives of the two American Airborne Divisions were dominated by two terrain features in the COTENTIN.

TERRAIN IN THE COTENTIN

The terrain in the south COTENTIN was dominated by the DOUVE RIVER, and its principal tributary the MERDERET flowing generally south and southeast and then turning toward the sea. (See Map II-1) A lock and dam just north of CARENTAN controlled the drainage of the flat bottom lands and water meadows. (See Map II-3) At high tide the low marshland of the DOUVE and MERDERET are below sea level and by opening the locks these areas can be turned into shallow lakes, restricting all land travel to the established road net through CARENTAN and PONTE L' ABBE on the east and a narrow strip between ST. LO-D'OURVILLE and ST. PIERRE-DE-SAUVERE-DE-PIERRE-PONT on the west. (See Map II-2) On the east coast a low-lying meadowland behind UTAH BEACH had been flooded. Travel in the area immediately behind the beach was restricted to four causeways which cleared the inundated area by approximately one foot. (See Map II-4) The area just to the west of the inundation dominated the exits from the causeways and the beach. Defenses immediately behind the beaches consisted of pill boxes, tank turrets mounted in concrete structures, and an elaborate system of trenches protected by barbed wire and antitank ditches. Similar defenses were constructed lineraly on the western edge of the inundated area. (6) Aerial photographs revealed numerous hasty field fortifications throughout the peninsula. (7) The terrain thus

(4) A-5, p.9
(5) PK
(6) A-1, p.4
(7) PK

dictated that the lock at CARENTAN, the bridges across the DOUVE, and the ground controlling the exits from the causeways be seized. Thus the terrain and the enemy dispositions were to dictate the airborne missions. (8)

ENEMY SITUATION
(See Map III)

Intelligence reports indicated that the 709th and 243d Infantry Divisions were disposed along the east and west coasts respectively. Shortly before the assault the 91st Infantry Division was found to have moved into the area in the rear of the assault beaches. A heavy emplaced coastal battery on the high ground near ST. MARTIN DE VARREVILLE dominated the entire beach. The 709th Division was known to contain a large percentage of non-Germans, particularly Georgians. Both divisions were classified as limited employment. The arrival of the 91st Division had changed the enemy capability on D-Day from a rigid defense of the beaches by the 709th Division with piecemeal attacks by four battalions and one battalion combat team by the immediate availability of the 91st Infantry Division for counterattack. This caused a revision of the assault plan. The air advisors of General Eisenhower's staff were firmly against the airborne participation in the operation. Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory predicted unduly high losses in both troop carrier and airborne personnel. Despite this advice, the supreme commander made the decision in favor of the airborne assault. (See Map III) (9) (10)

MISSION AND PLANS

By a revised VII Corps operation order on 28 May 1944 the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions were to land in the eastern half of the

(8) A-1, p.3
(9) A-1, p.2
(10) A-5, p.9

peninsula between CARENTAN in the south and ST. MERE EGLISE in the north, and establish a bridgehead from which the Corps could pursue its mission of landing D-Day at H-Hour on UTAH BEACH and capture CHERBOURG without delay. (11)

The 101st Airborne Division had a primary mission of securing the western edge of the inundated area behind UTAH BEACH and controlling the causeway exits; and a secondary mission of securing VII Corps' south flank, and be prepared to exploit to the south. (12) (13) (See Map IV)

The 502d Parachute Infantry with the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion attached was to land on DROP ZONE (DZ) "A", secure the northern two beach exits and destroy the enemy coastal battery at ST. MARTIN DE VARREVILLE. The 501st Parachute Infantry with the 2d Platoon, Company C, 326 Airborne Engineer Battalion attached was to land on DZ "D", seize the locks on the DOUVE RIVER at LA BARQUETTE, and the bridges over the DOUVE RIVER between CARENTAN and ST. COME DU MONT. The 506th Parachute Infantry with the 1st and 3d Platoons, Company C, 326 Airborne Engineer Battalion attached was to land on DZ's "C" and "D" at H minus 5 hours, secure the southern two beach exits, the bridges over the DOUVE RIVER at LE PORT and protect the division south flank. The 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry was to land on DZ "C" and revert to division reserve. A glider serial consisting of Division Headquarters, elements of the Signal Company, 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion, 362d Airborne Medical Battalion (these two batteries were antitank batteries) were to land at 0500 hours D-Day. Battery A, 81st AA Battalion was to be prepared for attachment to the 506th Parachute Infantry on landing. The remainder of the division, including the glider infantry regiment

(11) A-1, p.6
(12) A-4
(13) A-5, p.10

and two glider artillery battalions, were scheduled to land amphibiously about D plus one Day. (14) (15)

The 506th Parachute Infantry plan of action prescribed that the 2d Battalion with one battalion section of the regimental Demolition Platoon attached would land on DZ "C", and secure the beach exits. (See Map V) The 3d Battalion with the 1st and 3d Platoons of Company C, 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion and the remaining two demolition sections of the Demolition Platoon attached would land on DZ "D", seize the bridges over the DOUVE RIVER, prepare them for demolition to be blown only on regimental order, and establish a bridgehead on the south bank of the DOUVE RIVER. Regimental Headquarters Company and the 1st Battalion was to land on DZ "C". First Battalion would revert to regimental reserve, on landing, in the vicinity of CULOVILLE. Two additional missions were given the 1st Battalion: (1) To cut the CARENTAN-CHERBOURG power line, and (2) to demonstrate with one reenforced platoon from Company B, toward ST. MARIE DU MONT while the 2d Battalion moved north of the town to the beach exits. (16) (17)

PREPARATIONS

Planning for the operation on the part of the regiment had been continuous from the time of the initial receipt of the mission the first week in April. The regimental plan was evolved at that time and the battalion commanders and their staffs briefed the following week. Numerous rehearsal exercises took place in the intervening months before the invasion. The two most important of which were Exercises Tiger and Eagle. Exercise Tiger was the rehearsal of the amphibious phase of the UTAH BEACH assault with all elements of the landing force

(14) A-4
(15) A-2, p. 92
(16) A-4
(17) PK

participating in the landings in the SLAPTON SANDS area in southern ENGLAND. The parachute elements simulated landings as their part of the exercise. The country in this part of ENGLAND bore a marked resemblance to the hedgerow countryside of NORMANDY. Exercise Eagle, May 9-12, was a complete airborne rehearsal of the actual operation. The regiment was sealed into marshalling areas at UPPOTERY and EXETER and assigned to work with the 439th and 440th Troop Carrier Groups. (18) Aircraft loads including live ammunition and other impedimentia were used for this exercise. The flight pattern flown by troop carrier was identical to the pattern flown on the actual operation. The exercise was a success despite the loss through injuries in the regiment of 160 men due to a badly scattered drop. Despite the personnel losses, the lessons learned regarding the mounting procedure for the operation were of great aid a few weeks later. (19)

The regiment moved from its base camps to the departure fields, and was sealed in at the fields 29 May 1944. Service troops from Southern Base Section performed the majority of the housekeeping details, and the regiment settled down to the priority business of briefing for the operation. Ordnance, Quartermaster, and Signal repair teams were furnished to make last minute repairs to, or exchange, equipment. The regiment was located at UPPOTERY, the 3d Battalion was twenty-five miles distant at EXETER. Here for the first time, from company level down, commanders and troops learned their actual target area and date of the operation. Briefing was by platoon after the initial briefings of company commanders by battalion commanders and staff. A general briefing on the entire scope of OPERATION NEPTUNE was given to all personnel, and the missions of both US Airborne Divisions covered in detail. Personnel were briefed that if

(18) EW
(19) PK

landed in an incorrect area they were to join the nearest airborne unit and remain with it until the situation clarified itself. This was to become standing operating procedures (SOP) for airborne operations and had a salutary effect on their success. Detailed attention was given to the flight plan, drop zones, assembly areas and assembly technique, routes to and the regimental objectives; as well as the units designated to perform the missions. The enemy situation was studied along with the terrain expected to be encountered. Aerial photograph coverage was superior. Low obliques of the target areas covering periods up to a few hours prior to take off were provided. These were studied assiduously for signs of anti-airborne obstacles and emplacements on or near the drop zones. Enemy information was so detailed as to provide the time that the German commander in ST. COME DU MONT walked his dog each evening. (20)

Thorough map coverage was provided. Each individual was provided with a 1:100,000 map of the entire peninsula; each officer, first sergeant and mortar squad leader was provided with 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 sheets of the division area of responsibility. In addition each individual was provided with a special night map made from a vertical photograph of the drop zone and immediate area. These maps were of 1:7,500 scale. Special defense maps covering all known enemy positions were provided all commanders to include company. All individuals were required to draw from memory the principal road and railway nets to include principal towns on the peninsula. Special terrain models were provided which covered the area in detail. These briefing aids substituted for the normal necessary ground reconnaisance,

(20) EW

which cannot be made in an airborne operation. (21) (22) (23)

Special equipment for the operation was issued. Gas impregnated clothing, assault type gas masks and other chemical equipment were issued. Parachutists first aid kits were issued for the first time, these included a morphine syrete, tourniquet, and large carlisle type shell dressing. Benzedrine tablets were issued to each company commander. Air Force type escape kits containing a small compass, silk map, steel file, French money and a silk map of FRANCE were issued. British leg bags were obtained to allow crew served weapons personnel and radio operators to drop with their equipment attached.

Standard equipment to be worn by each parachutist had already been provided for by SOP, this included grenades and the basic load of ammunition for individual and crew served weapons. In addition, all individuals were required to carry one British Hawkins type antitank mine which was to be collected in the assembly area and used for antitank defense when necessary. All individuals were allowed to carry any additional ammunition that they desired. Most company commanders designated personnel to carry extra mortar and machine gun ammunition.

To aid in assembly, recovery of equipment, and recognition of friendly troops, additional equipment was issued. An ordinary ten cent store tin cricket was to be used for recognition the first night, one click the challange--two the reply. Luminous disks were provided to aid in identification of officers. This was not a popular item and most were discarded prior to enplaning. Luminous coils were provided to supplement the equipment bundle lights, which had a short life, to aid in their recovery. Orange smoke, flares, and flags were

(21) S-1
(22) S-2
(23) EW

to identify friendly units to include the forces assaulting on the beach. This color was selected since the Germans were known not to have any smoke or flares of this color.

Flight manifests were prepared, aircraft loaded with equipment, French currency issued, joint briefings with the airforce conducted, and church services overflowed. (24)

It is necessary to understand the organization of the Parachute Infantry Regiment of that date. The regiment consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company and three Battalions. The Headquarters Company contained a Communication and Demolition Platoon containing three battalion sections. Service company consisted of a parachute maintenance platoon, administrative platoon, and a transportation platoon, containing all organic transportation and drivers of the regiment. Each battalion consisted of a Headquarters Company and three Rifle Companies. The Headquarters Company contained a communication platoon, light machine gun platoon, and an 81mm mortar platoon. Rifle Companies consisted of three platoons. Each platoon, weapon or rifle, had a platoon leader and an assistant platoon leader, both officers. Each platoon had two rifle squads and a 60mm mortar squad. Each rifle squad was provided with a light machine gun and a replacement machine gun to be dropped in containers. A manning table for the operation provided a provisional 2.36 in. rocket launcher platoon for each battalion headquarters company for antitank protection. Wire sections in regimental and battalion communication platoons were doubled in size. Two naval gunfire support parties were attached to be dropped with the regiment. These parties consisted of army personnel specially trained as parachutists and in naval gunfire support technique. Only one artillery

(24) EW

liaison party accompanied the regiment since no artillery support was planned for the regiment until after the arrival of the 321st Glider Field Artillery Battalion on D plus 1. (25)

On 3 June 1944 pigeons arrived. These birds were to be used as an alternate means of communication back to ENGLAND if all other means failed. It was noted in the order that they could only be held three days so all knew that the time was close at hand. On 4 June notice was received that D-Day had been postponed 24 hours due to bad weather in the channel. A ration already drawn including white bread, steak, and ice cream was fed that night as well as the next. The white bread was the first issued since the regiments' arrival in ENGLAND in September 1943. (26)

5 June was spent in final briefings and checking equipment. At 2000 hours men blackened their faces, and marched to the hangers to secure their equipment and load into the aircraft. The march from the hangers to the aircraft was fatiguing since the average man carried approximately one hundred pounds more than his normal weight with all equipment. Flight manifests were checked and copies picked up by the airdrome liaison officer for delivery to the serial commander, unit personnel section at the base camp, and the air force. Messages from Generals Eisenhower, Montgomery, and the regimental commander were delivered to each jumpmaster to be read after takeoff. Motion sickness pills were issued and taken by all personnel prior to takeoff. Engines were run up and the planes were airborne at 2310. (27)

NARRATION

THE FLIGHT
(See Map I-1)

The Regiment minus the 3d Battalion took off from UPPOTERY FIELD

(25) PK
(26) EW
(27) EW

in two serials, total number of aircraft 81, and were scheduled to land on DZ "C". Lead aircraft of each serial were provided with "Gee" radar scanning equipment in addition to the standard planned position indicator equipment. At about the same time two other serials with the 3d Battalion, 501st Regiment and elements of Division Headquarters, Signal Company, and Division Artillery were taking off from WELFORD AIRDROME and were scheduled to follow the regiment on DZ "C". (28) The 3d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry with its attached engineer platoons took off from EXETER and was scheduled to follow the remainder of the 501st Regiment on DZ "D". (29)

The pilot-jumpmaster conferences had covered the flight SOP's; serial compositions, time (six minutes from lead ship to the lead ship of the following serial) between serials; flight plan, and particular emphasis had been given to jump signals and procedure. A tight "V of V's" formation was prescribed for all serials. Simultaneous exits were to be made from all ships in the serial on signal from the lead ship. The jump signal was to be given by radio and by the flashing of a green Aldis lamp in the astrodome of the lead aircraft. Drop altitude was to be a minimum of six hundred and a maximum of 1,000 feet with aircraft stacking up twenty-five feet between each element of nine ships. Airspeed for the drop was to be 110 miles per hour. A twenty minute verbal warning signal was to be given by the crew chief, then a red light five minutes from the DZ, and the green light over the pathfinders "T". On the green light all troops would exit from the aircraft. No evasive action was to be taken by any aircraft, and aircraft missing prescribed DZ's were instructed to return and drop their troops on DZ "D". The later action was prescribed

(28) A-2, p. 73
(29) PK

for all aircraft carrying 101st Airborne Division personnel. (30) (31)

Pathfinders were to precede the troop serials by one hour. Upon arrival they were to set up an illuminated "T" of British haliphane lights with radar and radio homing devices at the bisection of the head and tail of the lighted "T". All troop carrier aircraft were capable of receiving these signals. A squad of men commonly called the "Pathfinders Protective Association" accompanied each Pathfinder Team for local security during this phase of operations. Both the pathfinder teams and security personnel were from the units scheduled to drop on the respective DZ's. Pathfinder teams were provisional units and not organic to Airborne units at this time. (32)

The flight was without incident until the west coast of the COTENTIN PENINSULA was reached. Some ineffective light flak had been directed at the serials as they passed between the CHANNEL ISLANDS and the peninsula. The tide was low and the tidewater obstacles that had been constructed could be clearly seen as the coast was crossed. Immediately after the crossing a heavy fog bank was encountered and the tight flying serials had to break up their formations to avoid midair collisions. As a rule, three ship elements stuck together. Antiaircraft artillery positions, alerted by the passing of prior serials, began to fire at the already scattered serials. Air discipline was lost and it became a matter of each small element for itself as the overcast was cleared. Some aircraft could be observed falling in flames and exploding. In violation of orders, some aircraft took evasive action even going down to tree top level to avoid the fire. (33) (34)

The speed of assembly following a drop is directly proportional

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(30) A-2, p. 73
(31) A-8, p.2
(32) PK
(33) EW
(34) A-5, p. 12

to the density of the personnel dropping on the field. Excellent drop zones had been selected. The conditions of wind and visibility after clearing the fog bank were as good as can be expected for night operations. The actions taken by the troop carrier aircraft precluded a rapid reorganization on the ground. (35)

THE DROP
(See Map VI)

Of the 81 aircraft scheduled to drop on DZ "C", ten found their mark. Of these ten aircraft four were from Regimental Headquarters Company and the remainder from the 1st Battalion. Some fire from machine guns and machine pistols was encountered on the DZ but was soon eliminated by individual action. The remainder of the 1st Battalion received a relatively concentrated drop to the east in the direction of ST. MARIE DU MONT. Three aircraft carrying the bulk of the regimental communications platoon dropped approximately 22 miles from the designated drop zone. Aircraft carrying the 2d Battalion passed by drop zone "C" and deposited their sticks about five miles to the northeast in the vicinity of the 502d Parachute Infantry's DZ. Most of Company F, 2d Battalion was deposited in ST. MERE EGLISE which was to be the principal objective of the 82d Airborne Division upon their arrival. At DZ "D", another story was taking place. The pathfinders had become immediately engaged upon landing. The enemy was alerted and had fired an oil soaked building which illuminated the area and was covering it with mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire. Despite this apparent advantage, the Germans did not attempt to manuever or close with out troops. This was to be the story throughout the peninsula wherever parachutists landed, and the German soon lost his advantage. It had been an old story during training jumps, particularly at night, for the situation to be extremely confusing initially. The statement

(35) PK

was now made, "They were confused and so were we, only we were more used to it." The 3d Battalion lost its Battalion Commander, Executive Officer, Battalion S-2, and two company commanders in this initial action. (36) (37) (38) (39)

The enemy's failure to take advantage of the scattering of this and other regiments was to be the principal reason for the success of the airborne operation as a whole. It limited the enemy's commitment of reserves for wherever they tried to turn out troops they encountered small groups of parachutists who immediately engaged them in fire fights. It also hindered to a great extent their analysis as to location of the actual airborne objectives. It was not until 0400 that the Chief of Staff, Seventh Army High Command, received information that "the general plan seemed to be to tie the peninsula off at its narrowest point". (40)

Numerous individuals landed in the inundated areas and small drainage ditches. Some were drowned trying to extradite themselves from the T-5 type parachute assembly, which was standard equipment for all parachutists at this time. The T-5 parachute did not have the quick release device common to all troop parachutes at the present time. All personnel experienced difficulty getting out of their harnesses; the majority having to cut themselves out of the harness. (41)

THE ASSEMBLY

In the assembly areas a slow and incomplete reorganization was taking place. This was due to the nature of the terrain as well as

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(36) A-2, p. 100
(37) A-1, p.23
(38) A-3, p. 4
(39) EW
(40) A-2, p. 137
(41) EW

the result of the scattered drop. The size of the hedge rows had not been taken fully into account in the briefings prior to departure. Each hedgerow averaged about three feet in width and six feet in height and was capped with brushlike vegetation or tall Lombardy poplars. Visibility was limited from one small field to the next. Each man landing in one of these small fields had the feeling of being the only man in NORMANDY and was effectively isolated from other jumpers a short distance away. The normal sonic assembly aids such as bells, bugles, and whistles failed due to the battle noises. Colored lights were limited in range due to the mask formed by the trees surrounding the fields. Dead reckoning and a thorough knowledge of the terrain had to be depended upon for those that were not already engaged in fire fights to reach the designated areas. (42)

After approximately two hours in the designated assembly areas adjacent to DZ "C", only about 75 to 100 men had assembled. These included four sticks from Regimental Headquarters Company containing the regimental commander, Colonel Robert L. Sink, and the regimental staff, headquarters personnel, the attached artillery liaison party and naval gunfire support party, Lt. Col. William L. Turner, the 1st Battalion Commander, and approximately forty men from various companies of the 1st Battalion. (43)

The 2d Battalion was experiencing the best reorganization in the regiment due mainly to the efforts of Captain Clarence Hester, the battalion S-3. He hung a string of amber lights high in a tree and dispatched men to round up members of the battalion in adjacent fields. 1st Lt. Lewis Nixon, the battalion S-2, who could speak French fluently, was dispatched to the nearest village to find their exact location. He discovered they were in the vicinity of

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(42) EW
(43) EW

FOUCARVILLE about five miles from the battalion's objective. The battalion commander and 15 men put in their appearance about 0330 and Lt. Co. Robert L. Strayer took command of his unit. By 0430 about 200 men were assembled, the bulk from Battalion Headquarters Company and Company D. Twenty men from the 508th Parachute Infantry of the 82d Airborne Division were encountered and absorbed by the battalion. (44)

The 3d Battalion's reception on DZ "D" precluded any reorganization in its designated areas. The loss of the command echelon, on landing, added to the confusion. The battalion S-3, Captain Charles G. Shettle, landed near the southwest corner of the drop zone. Heavy enemy fire was coming from the direction of ANGOUVILLE AU PLAIN (the direction of the planned assembly area). He decided to move in the direction of the 501 assembly area, since he heard no sound of bugles (the 3d Battalion sonic assembly aid). He soon collected two officers and thirty men and, finding no one in the 501 assembly area, took off at 0430 for the 3d Battalion objective. Enroute he was joined by five officers and fifteen men. One officer was the Protestant Chaplain, Capt. Tildon S. McGee. Thus the 3d Battalion consisted of five officers, including one chaplain, and forty-five men. (45) (46)

On all drop zones, the recovery of equipment dropped in serial delivery containers was as difficult as the reorganization of the men. Normally, only the crew served weapons, ammunition, and radios that had been carried on the individuals were available. As a general rule, all personnel abandoned their gas masks and allied chemical equipment immediately after landing. (47)

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(44) S-4
(45) A-3, p. 16
(46) PK
(47) EW

SEIZURE OF THE EXITS
(See Map VII-1)

The regimental command group and elements of the 1st Battalion proceeded to the planned command post at CULOVILLE. Upon interrogation of the French inhabitants CULOVILLE was discovered to be a large farm consisting of a courtyard, barns, and a large house, all of masonry construction. The natives during the questioning, conducted mainly by Capt. John S. Maloney, the Catholic Chaplain (since he seemed to be the only individual whose French could be understood) disclosed that the group was at the planned location. In attempting to identify the location, the ship channel to CARENTAN was selected as a reference point. This, on the maps, was referred to as "LE GRAND CANAL".

The Frenchwoman merely kept shaking her head and stating, "le grand cannon," and pointing on the map to the vicinity of HOLDY. Her meaning was to be clear later in the day. (48)

During the remaining hours of darkness, patrols were dispatched without success in all directions from the regimental command post in an attempt to establish contact with other elements of the regiment and the division. Some stragglers were collected. No radio communication could be established with the elements of the regiment. Before daylight Col. Sink made the decision to dispatch Lt. Col. Turner and fifty men of the 1st Battalion to secure EXIT NO. 1. This decision to secure one exit was dictated by the size of the available force. (49)

The 2d Battalion had moved out at 0430 toward the southern exits. It initially followed a route just taken by the 1st Battalion, 502d Parachute Infantry and encountered determined resistance almost immediately. Company D, the leading company, killed approximately

(48) EW
(49) EW

twenty-five of the enemy and took as many prisoner. Four machine gun positions were destroyed in this action. (50) Between 0900 and 1100 the head of the column reached ST. GERMAIN DE VARREVILLE and was halted by enemy artillery concentrations layed accurately across the road. Company D was ordered to bypass the concentration area and proceed on to secure EXIT NO. 2. The company reached the village of HOUDIENVILLE about 1330 hours after sporadic fighting. HOUDIENVILLE itself was taken under control after little resistance. The remainder of the battalion was engaged with the German battery north of HOUDIENVILLE. 1st Lt. Richard D. Winters, who had taken command of Company E after the loss of the aircraft containing the company commander, moved down to the beach and returned with a platoon of tanks, the remainder of the battalion succeeded in eliminating the artillery battery and proceeded to HOUDIENVILLE. By 1800 hours the battalion had established a defense of the exit area. The battalion, including strays, had grown to an aggregate strength of about three hundred. (51) (52) (53)

Unknown to Col. Sink, about 150 men from the 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry and Division Headquarters had assembled in the vicinity of HIESVILLE about 1500 yards distant from his command post. Included in this group was the Division Commander, Brig. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, the Artillery Commander, Brig. Gen. Anthony C. MacAuliffe, and the 3d Battalion, 501, Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Julian J. Ewell. About the same time that Col. Sink decided to dispatch Turner and his force to EXIT NO. 1, Gen. Taylor made a similar decision with the group near HIESVILLE. The division commander was experiencing the same difficulties in contacting his units as were lower unit commanders.

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(50) S-3
(51) A-3, p. 15
(52) S-3
(53) S-4

Ewell's force, including the two generals, moved out cross country, encountering only light resistance enroute. Some resistance was encountered in POUPPEVILLE. House to house combat ensued, and by 1200 hours the town was cleared. Ewell's force had lost six killed and twelve wounded. The enemy, fifteen killed, ten wounded and thirty-eight captured; most were non-Germans of the 1058 Grenadier Regiment of the 91st Division. Contact was made with the US 4th Division at 1230 hours. This was the first contact between the airborne and amphibious forces. Gen. Taylor, remarking about this action later, stated that, "Never were so few led by so many." (54) (55)

Turner's force after encountering light resistance also arrived at POUPPEVILLE, but too late to share in its capture. Turner was directed to return to CULOVILLE. (56)

ACTION AT HOLDY
(See Map VII-1)

While the Turner Force was enroute to EXIT NO.1, other members of the 1st Battalion began to assemble at the regimental command post. About 500 yards to the east of CULOVILLE was a small settlement called HOLDY. Here the company commander of Hq. Co. 1st Battalion, Captain Lloyd E. Patch, encountered Captain Knut H. Raudstein, C Company Commander. They were joined by a force of about ten men from all companies but "C" of the battalion and two men from the 508 Regiment of the 82d Airborne Division. Their armament included a M1903 rifle with grenade launcher, and a light machine gun. This group collected near the buildings in HOLDY. Other scattered groups in the vicinity were engaging a four gun battery of 105mm howitzers which were firing in the direction of the beach. This battery was emplaced in a hastily prepared position about twenty yards from the houses.

(54) A-3, p. 22
(55) A-2, p. 98
(56) A-3, p. 25

The battery had not appeared on any intelligence reports prior to the landings. Patch and Raudstein decided that the only way to take the battery was by assault with their small force. They set the machine gun up and fired on the battery. The artillery men ceased the battery fire and went for the prepared holes in the hedgerows and the ditches which had been converted into trenches surrounding the field. One officer decided to remain with the machine gun and also make use of the rifle with the grenade launcher to set up a base of fire while the remainder of the force manuevered across the road and entered the ditch from the northwest where the artillery battery was taking cover. As the plan was about to go into effect, the battalion antitank officer and two men with one 2.36 inch rocket launcher put in their appearance. It was decided to have them enter the ditch from the opposite direction from the first group. The machine gun was set up to cover their advance and rifle grenade man took position near the building on top of a hedgerow. As targets were being designated for him, he was wounded in the neck and evacuated to a temporary aid station at HOLDY.

The group left their positions under cover of the fire from the machine gun which was laying fire down the road adjacent to the position. The flanking units advanced tossing grenades and the rocket launcher team fired into the ditch. The Germans had stacked small arms and artillery ammunition in the ditch and some of this exploded. The groups converged in the center of the position. All fight had left the artillerymen who had no taste for close combat. Fifty enemy dead were counted and thirty taken prisoner.

After the fall of the position, additional members of the battalion began to emerge from positions near the battery where they had been pinned down since landing. Several equipment bundles were

recovered in the position and the bodies of several members of the unit who had landed in the position the previous night. Several members of the division staff of the 82d Airborne Division, including the Chief of Staff, were recovered from a wrecked glider near the field. (57)

Meanwhile, reports of the action at HOLDY reached the CP at CULOVILLE. Col. Sink dispatched a lieutenant and fifty men from the 502d Regiment to aid in the capture of the battery. At this time it was realized that these were the "grand cannon" that the Frenchwoman had been trying to point out shortly after our arrival.

The Patch-Raudstein force had in the meantime received permission from regiment to attempt to seize ST. MARIE DU MONT. They decided on similar tactics used in taking the gun position but were stopped by mortar and machine gun fire and returned to the battery position. Here the lieutenant from the 502, fearful that he could not hold the position, had blown the breeches of three of the guns. The remaining gun was boresighted on the church steeple in ST. MARIE DU MONT, a suspected enemy observation post. The third round from the piece holed the steeple. The force again attempted to move out toward the town. At about 1300 elements of the 4th Division approached the town from the beachside and the town fell. The force returned to the vicinity of the regimental CP. The occupants of the church steeple were then discovered to be other members of the regiment who had landed in the town the previous night and taken up positions in the steeple. From this vantage point they had been delivering fire on the German occupants of the town. They were uninjured as a result of the bore-sighting shots. Col. Sink ordered the remaining 105mm howitzer back to the CP for further use since

(57) S-2

the regiment as yet had no supporting artillery. (58) (59)

COMMAND POST ACTION
(See Map VII-3)

Meanwhile at the regimental command post, Col. Sink was attempting to contact the elements of his command with all means available. One officer led patrol moved through the villages of HIESVILLE and VIERVILLE without encountering any enemy. No installations of the division headquarters were found in HIESVILLE. (60) Another patrol was dispatched to contact the 3d Battalion at its objective but returned without success. The Headquarters Commandant led a patrol in the direction of VIEREVILLE and was killed after destroying two of three machine gun positions encountered at a crossroad. (61)

In the interim, contact by SCR 300 radio was established with the 2d Battalion. The commander of Btry. A, 81st Abn. AA Bn. checked in with four 57mm guns towed by ¼ ton trucks which had landed by glider at 0500. (62)

After three officer led patrols had failed to locate the 3d Battalion in the vicinity of DZ "D", Col. Sink and Maj. Hannah, his S-3, accompanied by two orderlies, attempted to accomplish what others had failed. They proceeded by ¼ ton truck through VIEREVILLE, and about one mile south of the road to ST. COME DU MONT sped past an enemy house park. The sentry at the gate was shot by Hannah as they sped on. Along the road in the ditches, Germans began to rise but Col. Sink's group continued on their way firing their pistols. Col. Sink realized that this could go on only so long and directed the driver to turn around at the next crossroads. They reversed their course and actions

(58) S-1
(59) PK
(60) EW
(61) A-3, p. 29
(62) EW

and returned to the CP without further incident. The Germans were too surprised to return their fire. (63) (64)

The CP was located in a small depression between two low lying hills and as the day progressed, additional members of the regiment began to collect at this point. The enemy began to infiltrate towards CULOVILLE and took it under sporadic rifle and machine gun fire. Twice the small CP force was mustered to drive off these attacks. The enemy ceased his attempts to capture CULOVILLE for unknown reasons. (65)

A parachute resupply scheduled for just after noon arrived, but the bulk of the supplies missed DZ "C". The regimental S-4, utilizing native carts and horses, had succeeded in collecting a sizeable munitions and equipment dump from the resupply drop and containers recovered from the previous night's drop. The 3d Battalion S-4 arrived but had no knowledge of his battalion's situation. He and the men with him were mounted on horses taken from a Georgian Cavalry unit. They had killed about ten men and captured their horses. (66)

THE BRIDGES AT LE PORT
(See Map VII-4)

Unknown to the regimental commander, the Shettle force was continuing on the 3d Battalion mission. An engineer officer with the group cut the CARENTAN-CHERBOURG power line as they crossed it and the group continued toward the bridges. They moved cross country by compass and encountered no enemy until they reached the bridges. The group was brought under fire from the high ground in the vicinity of BREVANDS. The bridges were brought under control by our fire. A volunteer, Pfc. Donald E. Zahn (later awarded a battlefield commission and a DSC for his action) crossed the bridge under enemy machine gun

(63) A-3, p. 30
(64) A-2, p. 127
(65) EW
(66) PK

fire and scouted the opposite shore. After a half hour he was joined by another volunteer, Pfc. George Montillo (also awarded a DSC and promoted to Sergeant). Later they were joined by additional members of the force. The force deployed against the enemy position and succeeded in killing 13 Germans and knocking out three machine gun emplacements. The force continued in their efforts to destroy the German positions and hold their bridgehead. Faced with a diminishing ammunition supply and continuing enemy reenforcements, they withdrew to the far bank. (67) (68) An officer and two men were dispatched towards OMAHA BEACH in hope that help could be obtained from that direction. This was as a result of Shettle's conclusion that help might be nearer in this direction than in the direction of the regiment. Ammunition was redistributed. Inventory disclosed that about 30 pounds of rifle ammunition per individual, one light machine gun with 175 rounds, a rocket launcher with six rounds, 250 pounds of plastic composition C, and one Hawkins mine per man was the total available. (69)

Unknown to the force was the fact that they were the only element of the regiment that had reached and held its objective on schedule. (70)

Shettle accompanied by two men started toward the LA BARQUETTE locks in an attempt to contact the 501 regiment. He arrived there in the afternoon and contacted the regimental commander, Col. Johnson. Col. Johnson had his shorefire control radio and Shettle relayed his situation to the division through the Navy. He found no help forthcoming from the 501 commander as his situation was similar to his own; so he returned to his position at the bridge.

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(67) A-2, p. 120
(68) A-3, p. 17
(69) A-3, p. 18
(70) PK

The remainder of the day was spent holding the position. One bundle containing small arms ammunition and another with K Rations were recovered. That night the group was joined by an additional 40 men of the battalion who had dropped in the vicinity of CARENTAN. Shortly after dark, seven of the engineers and two demolition men worked their way under the bridges and within a half hour prepared them for demolition. (71)

CONCENTRATION AND PLANS FOR D + 1

Despite the seeming uncontrolled and disconnected actions, the major strength of the division was gradually concentrating around the 506 CP. Unknown to the regiment at this time, the bulk of the regiment had landed on top of the entire 2d Battalion of the 191st Artillery Regiment. Early in the evening, Generals Taylor and MacAullife arrived at the CP. A plan was outlined for the next day's action.

The 1st Battalion 401st Glider Regiment was to be attached to the regiment and lead off in the direction of the DOUVE RIVER bridges into CARENTAN. The division commander had not learned of the plight of the forces of the 501 and 506 on the river. The glider battalion had come ashore D-Day and was in an assembly area near POUPPEVILLE. (72) (73) (74)

By this time, the regimental force had grown to 225 men from the 1st Battalion, 300 from the 2d Battalion, 40 from the 82d Division, the antitank platoon, and about 100 men from assorted units of the division.

The plan for a reconnaisance in force to the south through VIERVILLE and ST. COME DU MONT to the bridges. The order of movement was the 1st Battalion 401, 1st Battalion 506, 2d Battalion 506, Regimental Headquarters and the antitank platoon. Movement was to

(71) A-3, p. 26
(72) A-3, p. 28
(73) A-5, p. 18
(74) S-1

start from CULOVILLE at 0430. (75) (76)

RECONNAISANCE IN FORCE
(See Map VIII)

The 401st Glider Battalion failed to put in appearance as scheduled and Col. Sink decided to move out, replacing it with the 1st Battalion 506. Company C, with a strength of 30 men, moved off on the left of the road, and Company B with a strength of approximately 50, on the right. These understrength companies were given the mission of cleaning out the route of advance to a width of 200 yards, respectively, on each side of the route of advance. The hedgerows again offered excellent delaying positions for the enemy and with his knowledge of the terrain, continuous sniper, and occasional machine gune fire, delayed the advance. The column reached VIERVILLE, a distance of about 1100 yards, at 0900. One element of Company C was pinned down on the extreme left flank. (77) (78)

Gen. Taylor and Col. Sink contacted Turner in the church at VIERVILLE. The battalion was ordered to proceed through BEAUMONT to the crossroads south of ST. COME DU MONT. One towed 57mm gun was brought up and with its help Company C was disengaged. Enemy fire continued to harass the column and an organized enemy position at BEAUMONT stopped the 1st Battalion. Elements of the regiment had been warned not to fire into hedgerows or buildings unless fired upon. This order had been given since the location of the 501 and 3d Battalion 506 was still unknown, and was a definite deterent to rapid advance. The regiment, as yet, had received no artillery support. (79) (80) (81)

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(75) S-1
(76) PK
(77) PK
(78) S-2
(79) A-1, p. 73
(80) A-3, p. 38
(81) S-2

Meanwhile in the church at VIERVILLE, Col. Sink and Gen. Taylor observed several hundred troops milling in the open about 2000 yards to the south. Neither of the two officers could identify them through field glasses and Col. Sink remarked, "They must be our troops. Germans wouldn't move around like that." The troops were not fired on but a patrol was dispatched to identify them. The patrol returned with the report that they were Germans. The enemy had by this time disappeared from view to the south. (82)

A platoon of medium tanks from Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, arrived and was sent forward to the 1st Battalion. As the head of 2d Battalion passed through VIERVILLE, the enemy filtered back in and the fight for VIERVILLE was on again. This time, the enemy attack was in greater strength. Four of the tanks doubled back and with the help of portions of Company D hit the town from the south. Under pressure from two sides the Germans surrendered. About 150 surrendered; count of the dead was not taken. The majority of those taken were from the 6th Parachute Regiment. These troops were well equipped and clothed but gave a story of marching and counter marching and not knowing what was going on. One item of equipment captured was a wheeled 75mm recoiless rifle. This was the first and only weapon of this kind encountered by the regiment though its value was not realized. (83) (84) (85)

The 2d Battalion was ordered to continue the advance and move through ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. Elements of the battalion which had swung to the left of VIERVILLE had already closed into the village by 1100 hours. The remainder of the battalion closed into the town along with the regimental command post.

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(82) A-3, p. 38
(83) EW
(84) S-2
(85) S-1

The 1st Battalion, which had reached BEAUMONT at 1130, was held up by a strongly organized position centering around fortified farm buildings just west of the village. The position had twice been taken only to be lost through strong enemy counterattacks. The attacks moved up through previously prepared routes through hedgerows and trenches. Mortar and machine gun fire continued to fall on the battalion. Lt. Col. Turner, the battalion commander, was an ex-cavalryman and put great faith in armor. He mounted the lead tank and attempted to direct its fire against the machine guns which were holding up his advance. Twice he rounded a small bend in the road and each time the tank was struck by a rocket and withdrew. The tank moved forward again and Turner raised the tank hatch. He was killed immediately by a sniper, shot through the head. The advance again stopped. Turner had been killed in full view of most of his battalion and his death had a demoralizing effect on his men. He had been a very strong personal leader and little was known of the efficiency of his successor. At the same time, Company B and portions of Headquarters Company were heavily engaged in their right rear. At 1600 Company B with two tanks assaulted the fortified farm buildings without success. The tank platoon the returned to ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN to restock ammunition and refuel. (86) (87)

In the interim, Col. Sink, learning of the situation, decided to attach Company D and two tanks to the 1st Battalion and continue the attack on ST. COME DU MONT. Company D, commanded by Captain Jerre S. Gross, numbered 94 men and was the strongest company in the division at this time. (88) (89)

After the departure of Company D, the 2d Battalion, 501, was contacted at LES DROUERIES. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Ballard,

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(86) S-2
(87) A-3, p. 41
(88) PK
(89) A-3, p. 41

was also attempting to reach the remainder of the 501 near ST. COME DU MONT. After contacting division, Col. Sink ordered him to hold his position and protect the regiment's left flank while the 1st Battalion's attack took place. Ballard's force had been unable to move due to strong enemy forces to the east. (90) (91)

Major Franklin Foster assumed command of the 1st Battalion on Turner's death. When Company D arrived, he ordered the farm buildings again assaulted by Company B supported by the fires of Company D. The position fell and the advance was continued to the south. Company D, with one light tank, led the advance followed in order by Hq. A, B, and C Companies. Company D was considerably fresher than the troops of the 1st Battalion, and advanced rapidly, with the tank spraying the hedgerows with machine gun fire as it advanced. The company also engaged in spraying likely enemy positions with fire as it advanced.

Company D had little knowledge of the situation into which it was moving. It knew that there were supposed to be friendly troops in the vicinity of the crossroads below ST. COME DU MONT. The crossroads was to be the objective for the day and on arrival they were to put out orange flares as the friendly recognition signal. The company moved too fast for the tired 1st Battalion and an interval was created in the column. They reached the crossroads at 2300 and shot their flares. They had lost only one man in this advance. Promptly the signal was returned from both flanks and a cheer went up from the men. The company began to step out in the open and was greeted with heavy fire from both sides. They could not believe that it was the enemy since many of our own personnel had utilized captures weapons during the first days action. Unknown to the company was the location of Col. Ballard's

(90) S-1
(91) A-3, p. 43

force to the west, and the fact that they were between the two main defensive positions of the German 6th Parachute Regiment. The tank was hit and several members of the crew killed.

At this time the company received unexpected reenforcements. A convoy of eight trucks loaded with quartermaster supplies from UTAH BEACH had taken the wrong road, driven through the German positions and arrived at Company D's position without harm. They elected to remain with the company for safety's sake. (92) (93) (94)

The main portion of Headquarters Company and Company A had pushed on ahead of the remainder of the battalion and was closing in on the rear of Company D. As Foster's force passed a crossroad at 2230 hours, just west of ST. COME DU MONT, a tank accompanying this unit was destroyed by rocket fire. Machine gun and rifle fire struck the column from positions just north of ST. COME DU MONT and the advance halted. Word was passed to the rear of the column to send up machine guns and rocket launchers. This word was received as far back as Company C and the weapons were dispatched. Foster began to organize his position. Meanwhile, from sources unknown, word had reached Company B and Company C that they were to withdraw to BEAUMONT. The order was not questioned and these two companies withdrew and went into assembly areas in this area. Meanwhile Company D, not having received reenforcements fell back to Foster's position. The remaining force began to organize this position. Foster had notified regiment of his position but not that of Company D. (95) (96) (97) (98)

The regimental commander, not knowing that one company had reached the crossroad and believing that the force was already overextended,

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(92) A-3, p. 44
(93) A-2, p. 139
(94) PK
(95) S-2
(96) A-2, p. 141
(97) A-3, p. 46
(98) S-1

ordered it to withdraw to BEAUMONT. This Foster did reluctently as he felt that he could hold the position. He was also told that the reason for the withdrawal could not be stated by radio and told to report to the CP at ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. (99)

At the command post plans were being made for the next day's advance on ST. COME DU MONT. Additional reenforcements had arrived. The slow moving glider battalion was available. Two artillery battalions of the division had arrived and had begun registration on targets as had the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion which now was attached to the division. All these forces and the 1st Battalion 501st Regiment were attached to the regiment for the subsequent action. Plans for the first coordinated attack of the campaign were laid.

The regimental S-4 had obtained additional weapons and ammunition from the beach. The 2d Battalion was concentrated around the command post. Numerous stray prisoners were collected in the vicinity. The bulk of these were from the 6th Parachute Regiment. No count was kept of prisoners during this period and they were turned over to units on the beaches. Interrogation of prisoners revealed the general outline of the enemy defenses around ST. COME DU MONT. (100) (101)

THE BRIDGES AT LE PORT

No contact with the 3d Battalion at the bridges had yet been made, though it was learned through elements of the 501st Regiment that portions of the 3d Battalion were in position there. Shettle's force was fighting a private war cut off from other friendly units. The enemy confined his efforts during the morning of D plus 1 to shelling the area with mortars and artillery. A flight of P-47's appeared overhead at 1200 hours, Shettle signalled the aircraft with

(99) A-3, p. 48
(100) S-1
(101) EW

a cut up panel and asked for bombing of enemy position. At 1430 hours the planes returned and dropped twelve bombs, three landing in the battalion position. The lead plane came in for a strafing run and Chaplain McGee, who had been doubling as the medical officer for the group, ran out and waved a panel at the low flying aircraft, preventing further damage.

The force organized an all round position when approximately 200 Germans were seen approaching from the rear at 1530. A short but brisk fire fight ensued. Approximately 35 Germans were killed and the remainder surrendered. The prisoner bag was 235. The Germans had estimated Shettle's force at much more than its 75 man strength. As the night closed in, the Germans on the south shore made one more attempt to destroy the gridges but the attack was driven off. It was unknown, at this time, that the river was the boundary between two German Divisions defending the area which accounted for the uncoordinated attacks. The Shettle force continued its isolation through D plus 1 day. (102) (103)

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS

By the end of D plus 1 day the regiment had assembled about 650 of its men. This number was only about one third of the strength with which it had dropped. Of the missing men approximately 600 were later found to have been killed, captured or wounded on the initial drop. The regiment had failed in reaching the beach exits by H-Hour, though by a combination of forces, both EXITS 1 and 2 were secured prior to the arrival of the 4th Infantry Division. The regiment had destroyed two artillery batteries, which had previously not been noted on intelligence estimates. Enemy reserves, communications and command posts were disrupted. The 3d Battalion force was the only division unit to

(102) A-2, p. 148
(103) A-3, p. 50

seize its objective on schedule. The effect of the entire scattered airborne drop had a material effect on the decisions of the German commanders. The regiments move to the south, coupled with the holding of the bridges at LE PORT, had succeeded in protecting the south flank of VII Corps. The destruction of numerous enemy groups in the regiment's zone of action had permitted the rapid expansion of the beachhead. (104) (105) The light casualties duffered and the rapid expansion of the 4th Infantry Division from the beach can be attributed to the airborne effort in rear of UTAH BEACH. Conversely, the forces landing on OMAHA BEACH suffered heavy casualties and the expansion of the beachhead was slow against heavy resistance. It is believed that had an airborne force been dropped in rear of OMAHA BEACH, a rapid expansion with light casualties would also have been possible. (106)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. AIRBORNE PLANNING

The planning required for an airborne operation can best be understood when compared to an amphibious operation. It must be detailed and sufficient time alloted for joint rehearsals with troop carrier units. Briefing must be detailed, both in the training period and for the operation. Sufficient time was alloted for both rehearsals and planning. The lessons learned pertaining to mounting during EXERCISE EAGLE stood the regiment in good stead when the actual operation took place. The assignment of the same troop carrier-airborne teams for the training exercise and the actual mission aided in establishing teamwork. The elapsed time between takeoff and the actual drop precludes any briefing enroute to the target area. It is

(104) S-1
(105) PK
(106) Statement of Brigadier General C. D. W. Canham, the Commander 116th Infantry (one of the assault regiments on OMAHA BEACH), on 15 April 1947.

necessary to completely brief all personnel prior to takeoff. Commanders were cognizant of the possibility of a poor drop, and all personnel received detailed briefings not only of their own mission but of other units of the division as well. The requirement of all members of the regiment to draw a sketch of the principal road net and towns in the peninsula aided those dropped a distance from the drop zone. The SOP requiring parachutists landed in the wrong area to join the nearest unit added strength to those units and avoided loss of time trying to find their own units. The 502 and 508 Parachute Infantry members who joined the regiment D-Day were evidence of the wisdom of this briefing and planning.

2. MASS USE OF AIRBORNE TROOPS TO SUPPORT THE MAIN EFFORT

The combination of the vertical envelopment and the amphibious landing is a problem for any defending strategist. There is no doubt that the enemy knew of our airborne capability as was evidenced by his preparation of antiairborne obstacles in some of the likely landing areas. The oil soaked house in the vicinity of the 3d Battalion drop zone was one example. It was impossible to cover all likely landing sites. The rapid seizure of the port of CHERBOURG was considered essential if the troops on the beachhead were to be logistically supported. General Eisenhower's decision to use two airborne divisions behind UTAH BEACH to facilitate its early capture is a prime example of mass use of airborne troops to support the main effort. The light casualties and the rapid expansion of the forces landing on UTAH BEACH when compared to the stiff resistance and heavy casualties suffered on OMAHA BEACH supports the principle.

3. THE EFFECT OF WEATHER ON AIRBORNE OPERATIONS

Thorough coordination had been accomplished in the planning period for navigation of the troop carrier serials to their designated drop zones. The light ship in the channel, the use of radar scanning devices

on lead aircraft, and pathfinders seemed to insure the execution of a successful drop. The postponement of the operation for 24 hours on 4 June was the first evidence of the effect of weather. In this case the weather was suitable for the airborne portion of the operation but not for the seaborne forces. The weather for the actual flight was suitable yet the lack of accurate route weather information caused the serials to break formation to avoid collisions when the fog bank was encountered just after crossing the coast. It is believed that had a weather ship been dispatched on route weather reconnaisance and relayed information to the following troop carrier serials, that they could have flown over the fog bank and then dropped down to jump altitudes over the proper drop zones. The loss of air discipline by troop carrier personnel caused much bitterness among all airborne personnel. The failure of one member of the team to play his part can have disasterous results on the other. Fortunately, this was not the case but had the enemy chosen to close with the scattered parachutists the result might have been different.

4. EXECUTION

The enemy's failure to take advantage of the scattered drop is one of the great imponderables of the operation. It is the author's opinion that this failure aided more materially in the success of OPERATION NEPTUNE than had the airborne mission been executed as planned. The numerous reports of landings throughout the peninsula provided a superior inadvertant cover plan for the amphibious landings. The German staff could not correctly estimate the size of the force, or the objectives of the airborne troops. The Chief of Staff of the German Seventh Army concluded that the plan seemed to be to cut the peninsula at its narrowest point. Conversely, airborne troops are trained to expect confusion and enemy on all sides after

a drop. When these factors are considered couple with the cutting of routes of communication, disruption of commands, and continual harrassment by small groups of parachutists the enemy's slow reaction can more clearly be understood. The light casualties suffered and the rapid expansion from UTAH BEACH by the amphibious force was the result.

5. ANTIAIRBORNE DEFENSE

A static defense against airborne assault is doomed from the start. The wide choice of possible landing sites open to the airborne planner precludes the enemy covering all areas with troops or obstacles. Only light resistance was met on DZ "C" and this taken care of by individual action. On DZ "D" the enemy was alerted and prepared for the 3d Battalion's landing and despite the casualties they inflicted from static positions they failed to close with the badly disorganized parachutists. This failure resulted in a small group seizing and holding their objective. The enemy made no effort to counterattack in force. Had the 6th German Parachute Regiment, whose presence was unknown prior to the drop, been committed in force against any of our landings, there would have been no organized force of sufficient strength to stop them.

6. QUICK RELEASE HARNESS

The T-5 type troop parachute assembly, which was standard equipment at the time of the operation, had snaps and rings to fasten it to the jumper. This provided maximum safety while jumping, but great difficulty was encountered in releasing the harness after landing. The large amount of equipment that was carried by each individual added to this difficulty. The loss of men by drowning, and those killed trying to release themselves from the harness under fire indicated the need for a quick release device on the harness. All

personnel experienced some difficulty getting out of their harness, most of them having to cut the harness loose with a knife.

7. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Adequate provisions had been made, during planning, for communication. Wire sections in both the regimental and battalion communication platoons had been doubled in size. The loss of the entire regimental communication platoon in the initial drop seriously affected the successful operation of the communication system in the regiment. Lacking contact with the 2d Battalion, the regimental commander was forced to make a decision to send Turner's force to seize their objective. Lacking other means, the regimental commander's decision to send officer led patrols to contact his subordinate elements was excellent. Captain Shettle's attempt to relay information of his situation through the navy by a shorefire control party was another example of the use of an alternate means of communication. Col. Sink's patrol through VIERVILLE in an attempt to find the 3d Battalion was the ultimate in trying to establish communication.

8. MISSION

The time and location of the main landings in NORMANDY caught the Germans totally by surprise. The airborne effort contributed to this surprise in no small way as has already been discussed. Essentially, the first two days' action of the regiment might best be termed "small unit actions throughout a zone." Captain Shettle's 3d Battalion group was the only unit to secure their objective on schedule. Shettle's actions in determining to seize the battalion objective with his small group was an excellent example of an officer keeping the mission of his unit foremost in his mind. Lacking contact with subordinate units, the almost simultaneous and separate decisions of Gen. Taylor and Col. Sink to send the largest units under

their control to seize EXIT 1 was the second example. The 2d Battalion Commander's decision to bypass the resistance offered by the enemy artillery battery and have Company D secure EXIT 2 was the third example. The small size of the forces securing the objectives indicates the importance of the confusion caused by the numerous actions being fought by the small groups of scattered parachutists throughout the zone of action.

9. TACTICAL PROFICIENCY

It is of particular importance in airborne operations that all officers be proficient, not only in their own but also that of their superior's and subordinate's jobs. The decision of Captains Patch and Raudstein to attack the enemy battery at HOLDY with what amounted to less than a squad is indicative of the situation that can confront any officer in an airborne operation. Col. Sink's dispatching of officer led patrols from his staff is another. Captain Shettle, the 3d Battalion S-3, assumed command of the 3d Battalion elements and with it assumed the responsibilities of that command. Col. Sink's action in attempting to contact the 3d Battalion himself is another. Lt. Col. Turner, the 1st Battalion Commander, had what amounted to a reenforced platoon on his move to EXIT 1. The division commander experienced a similar experience leading Lt. Col. Ewell's force to EXIT 1.

10. FIREPOWER

The lack of supporting artillery and crew served weapons need not hinder a unit in securing and holding an objective in an airborne operation, providing leadership is aggressive, and maximum use is made of available firepower. At no time during the first two days' action was any supporting artillery available, yet the regiment's objectives were secured and numerous enemy killed or captured. The use of the German 105mm howitzer by the Patch-Raudstein force to fire

on the church steeple in ST. MARIE DU MONT is an example of using available means. The regimental commander's instructions not to fire on likely enemy targets in the advance to the south was a mistake and the slow advance the result. However, the instructions are understandable in the light of the fluid situation. Company D's use of the firepower of the accompanying tank, coupled with their own fires on likely targets in their advance on ST. COME DU MONT, clearly showed the rapid progress that can be made with aggressive leadership and use of supporting fires. Company D lost only one man in the advance as a result.

LESSONS

1. All personnel participating in an airborne operation must be given detailed and complete preoperational briefing.

2. Airborne troops should be committed in mass to support the main effort.

3. Weather plays a dominant part in the planning and execution of airborne operations.

4. An airborne assault need not be executed as planned to achieve the desired result.

5. The best defense against airborne attack is to close immediately with all forces locally available and counterattack in force as soon as possible.

6. A quick release device for the troop type parachute assembly is essential.

7. When communication is lost or not established, commanders at all echelons must use all means possible to establish contact.

8. Despite apparent odds and a confusing situation, commanders must keep their mission foremost in their mind.

9. Tactical proficiency is essential for all officers,

regardless of assignment, for airborne operations.

10. Maximum use of all available firepower must be made at all times if a rapid advance with light casualties is to be accomplished.