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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY G, 327TH GLIDER INFANTRY
(101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN HOLLAND
18 SEPTEMBER - 15 OCTOBER 1944
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

TYPE OF OPERATION DESCRIBED: Glider Infantry
Company in The Defense and Attack

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Preparation for Operation "Market".....	4
Briefing and Mission.....	5
Terrain.....	7
Flight into Holland.....	8
Situation on D plus 2.....	10
The Action near Veghel.....	17
D plus 6, 23 September.....	19
The Situation at Veghel.....	20
The Battle of the "Island".....	21
Analysis and Criticism.....	31
Lessons.....	33
Map - General Map of the Area South of Eindhoven	
Map - Action in the Zonsche Forest	
Map - Action near Veghel	
Map - Action on the "Island"	

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company G, 327th Glider Infantry, in its initial landings in Holland on 18 September 1944, and the subsequent actions through 15 October 1944.

After the D Day landings and the campaign in Normandy, the 327th Glider Infantry was returned to its base camp near Reading, England, during the middle of July 1944. The next few weeks was a period devoted to rebuilding the units to their pre-D Day fighting efficiency. New Equipment was issued to cover battle losses. Former members of the Company, who had recovered from wounds received in Normandy, rejoined the unit. Replacements were received, sufficient to fill vacancies and to bring the company to approximately twenty per cent overstrength. Within a month the company had completed training in small unit problems designed to integrate the new men into the fighting team. Following this, the units were taken on tactical glider flights in connection with field problems to thoroughly familiarize the men with airborne tactics and inculcate the aggressive spirit so essential to the individual and unit for successful vertical envelopment. (1)

The table of organization for a glider unit at that time was such that it had an influence on tactics. In order to understand this seeming departure from some of the principles of tactics, as will be seen later, it will be necessary to be familiar with the unit composition. Formally, the regiment had only two battalions, but one battalion of the 401st Glider Infantry was added, thus

(1) Personal knowledge, self. A-2, p. 7.

making three. The anti-tank protection for the regiment, other than individual anti-tank weapons, was provided by two platoons of 37mm anti-tank guns within Headquarters Company. There was neither a Cannon Company nor an Anti-tank Company.

Each battalion was composed of three rifle companies and a Battalion Headquarters Company which had as an integral part, the heavy weapons of the battalion. These were organized into one mortar platoon of six squads with six 81mm mortars, and one machine gun platoon of four squads, each armed with one heavy machine gun. (2)

The Glider Rifle Company had an authorized strength of one hundred and fifty enlisted men and five officers. The company was organized into headquarters section, two rifle platoons, and a weapons platoon. Each rifle platoon contained three rifle squads and one 60mm mortar squad. The weapons platoon was divided into two sections of two squads each. One section had as its principal weapons two 60mm mortars. The other section had two light machine guns.

PREPARATION FOR OPERATION "MARKET"

On 11 September 1944, the Division was alerted for a mission. The units were issued a warning order to be prepared to move to departure airdromes within forty-eight hours. During this time, all the individual equipment of the men, except that to be taken into battle, was packed and stored along with organizational equipment that was to be left behind. The kitchen personnel was designated to go on the seaborne echelon and the truck for that element loaded. Basic and individual loads of ammunition were

(2) Personal knowledge, self. Statement, Capt James F. Adams.

drawn and readied for transportation to the departure fields where it would be broken down. (3)

The company was assigned fifteen gliders for the flight. The personnel was broken down into tactical glider groups, usually a squad plus extra men from Company Headquarters. The company basic load of ammunition was divided among the gliders, bearing in mind the type of ammunition needed by the personnel of that glider and the maximum allowable pay load. Using this information, manifests were prepared for each of the gliders, listing the personnel by name, rank, and serial number; and amounts, weight and type of ammunition and extra equipment to be carried. The manifest, also, designated which glider seats were to be occupied and the station at which each item was to be lashed to place the center of gravity of the total load at the proper station to insure correct flight.

On 15 Sept, the 2d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry was moved to its departure airdrome at Membury, near Hungerford, England. (4) During the time spent at the airport, the ammunition was distributed to the troops, gliders were loaded and lashed, British Pounds were exchanged for Dutch Guilders, and the company officers and men were briefed on Operation "Market". The job thus far was almost routine. Since the return from Normandy, this same procedure had been followed for three missions that did not materialize; Operations, "Transfigure", "Linnet", and "Comet". (5)

BRIEFING AND MISSION

The German situation since the break through at St. Lo had been far from favorable. By September, they had been pushed out of the major part of France and Belgium, with the northern flank generally paralleling the Excaudt

(3, 4) A-2, p. 14. (5) A-2, p. 3.

and Albert Canals to the Scheldt Estuary on the English Channel. (6)

Operation "Market" was an ambitious plan to cut north through Holland, from the British front to Arnhem in two or three days, a distance of sixty-four miles. This was to be accomplished by dropping the 101st and the 82d Airborne Divisions, the British 1st Airborne Division and a Polish Brigade at points along the forty-nine mile stretch of road extending from Eindhoven to Arnhem, Holland. The purpose for unrolling this stretch of road was to allow the advance of armor and other units of the British XXX Corps from Arnhem further north to the Zuyder Zee, hitting the coast in the vicinity of Nunspect. (7)

The advantages to be gained were; first, a thrust through the north would out flank the Siegfried Line and place the Allied Armies in a position to pour out across the Westphalian Plain and move south to the Ruhr or east to Berlin; second, the German forces in western Holland would be isolated, thus preventing their movement into Germany to reinforce the Siegfried Line; third, to secure shorter supply lines and prevent the Germans from waging a campaign slow and costly to the Allies by establishing successive lines along the many canals and three major rivers yet to be crossed. (8, 9)

The mission of the 101st Airborne Division was to seize the city of Eindhoven, the bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal near Zon, the bridges over the Aa River and the Will-ems Vaart Canal at Veghel. In order to accomplish this mission, the division would necessarily have to hold these towns and the major road nets leading into the corridor along sixteen miles of this vital road. This could be done

(6) A-2, p. 1. (7) A-1, p. 5, 6. A-5, p. 1. (8, 9) A-1, p. 4.

with the troops available only by setting up perimeter defenses around these key points mentioned, and using part of the forces for strong offensive action to keep the enemy off balance. (10)

The 82d Airborne Division was assigned similar missions along the corridor from Grave through Nijmegen and the bridge across the Waal River. The British 1st Airborne Division and the Polish Brigade were to land in the vicinity of Arnhem, to take that city and the bridge across the Neder Rijn River. This would complete the securing of the forty-nine mile corridor from Eindhoven to Arnhem for the passage of the British XXX Corps.

The 2d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry was to leave England on D plus 1, and come in on the LZ (Landing Zone) between the town of Zon and Best. Initially, it was to serve as part of the Division reserve.

TERRAIN

The terrain over which the initial operations of the 327th Glider Infantry was to take place was as flat as the proverbial pancake. Although the contour interval was ten meters, no difference in elevation could be shown for the triangular area, St. Oedenrode, Zon and Best. This was characteristic of the entire area for operation "Market" with the exception of the area near Nijmegen. Woods dot the area but the only real forest that affected the operation was the Zonsche Forest along the Wilhelmina Canal between Zon and Best.

The canals formed the major water barriers of the area along with the Waal, the Neder Rijn and the Maas Rivers. These rivers so drain that the waters of one may flow into the other. Tanks were road-bound primarily

(10) A-1, p. 6, 7. A-2, p. 12. A-4, p. 2.

because they could cross these canals and rivers only at the road bridges. When it became expedient for them to lash out through the fields, they were generally able to do so. The roads were good though usually not wide enough to comfortably accommodate two-way traffic. (11)

FLIGHT INTO HOLLAND

On D Day, 17 September, elements of the Parachute Regiments of the 101st Division were flown into Holland.

On 18 September, D Day plus 1, the weather was warm and clear except for a fog that was dissipated during the middle of the morning. It was good flying weather. The 2d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry, at its departure airfield at Membury, England, moved to the runway that was to be used for the take-off. Here the gliders had been pulled close together in two rows, one on either side of and at the end of the runway. Company G divided into glider groups and each group moved to its respective glider.

Ground crews of the Troop Carrier Command began attaching the long tow ropes to the gliders. As each C-47 tug ship wheeled on the runway a tow rope was fastened to it, and thus each successive glider began its long flight into Holland. The planes and gliders circled into formation and set out on the most northerly route that had been chosen for Operation "Market". (12)

The flight over England and the Channel was uneventful. As the formation passed over the Dutch Coast, the unarmed tow planes and gliders were subjected to sporadic enemy fire from small arms and flak. This continued until the landing zone was reached. (13)

(11) A-1, p. 10. (12) Personal knowledge, self. A-2, p. 11, 19. (13) Personal knowledge, self.

The LZ (Landing Zone) was a flat open field roughly two miles long and a mile wide with the long axis running east and west. (See Map #2). The LZ was located northwest of Zon near the Wilhelmina Canal. (14)

The glider train approached the LZ from the west and flew over the assembly area at the eastern end where the gliders out loose from the tow plane. The gliders then circled and about half of the Company G gliders landed at the western end of the LZ, two miles from the battalion assembly area. This was at 1530 hours, about three hours and fifteen minutes after the take off in England. (15)

Landing is one of the most critical periods for a glider unit. The men came out of the gliders as quickly as possible, taking up a perimeter defense until it could be determined whether or not the field was under enemy fire. Small arms and mortar fire could be heard in the distance but none in the immediate vicinity. (16)

The Company Commander called for a report on the number of gliders that landed in that vicinity. Orders were issued for the men to assemble. While this was being done, the captain oriented himself on the ground. (17)

Only about half of each platoon and Company Headquarters could be located. These were moved to the battalion assembly area. About a half hour later, the remainder of the company was brought in by Lt. Stanley Morris, leader of the first platoon. They had landed about one mile from the remainder of the company. (18)

At this time a complete report from each glider was received and a strength report submitted to Battalion Headquarters. All fifteen gliders of Company G had landed safe-

(14) A-4, Annex 4-A. (15) A-4, p. 2. (16, 17) Eye Witness, self. (18) Statement of officers and men to self.

ly. However, practically all had been hit by small caliber fire or flak during flight. One glider had been saved by the quick thinking members of a mortar squad, who quickly extinguished a fire that was started when small arms fire hit the load of mortar ammunition. (19) The only casualties were two men killed by shell fragments from an anti-aircraft shell that exploded beside the glider in which they were riding. (20)

Immediately after landing the battalion was alerted to aid the 502d Parachute Regiment in its attack on Best and to assist in the protection of the landing zone. However, no move was ordered that night. (21)

SITUATION ON D PLUS 2

Early in the morning of 19 September, it was evident that the initial mission of the Division had been accomplished. Tanks and motorized units of the British XXX Corps formed a steady stream of traffic moving north on the road to Arnhem. This meant that the 506th Parachute Regiment had captured Eindhoven, and the corridor was open for some distance up the road. (22)

Elements of the 502d Parachute Regiment were having a difficult time of carrying out its mission of capturing the town of Best, which was vital approach to the corridor from the west. In the two days past, the Germans had had sufficient time to move reserves and bring in additional troops. This increased pressure was manifest in the much slower progress and harder fighting for those units of the Division still advancing. Other units were having to repulse repeated counter attacks. (23)

The elements of the 502d assigned to the mission of

(19) Statement of officers and men to self. (20) Statement of officers and men to self. Personal knowledge, self. (21) A-1, p. 50. (22) A-1, p. 51. (23) A-1, p. 56.

holding Best had been forced back several hundred yards from the town. (See Map#2) (24).

During the morning, Colonel Ray Allen, Commander of the 3d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry, was ordered to move with his Battalion to the assistance of Company H, of the 502d, near Best. Leaving his battalion with his executive officer to move up, Colonel Allen hurried ahead to the 502d CP. While on the way, he stumbled upon a group of two hundred Germans marching south to reinforce those in the vicinity of Best. Colonel Allen called his battalion as quickly as possible and deployed it in order to delay this group. However the Germans, sensing danger, gave up their formation and hurried on. It is believed that many of them moved into the Zonsche Forest. (25)

General Higgins, Assistant Division Commander, was placed in the command of the combined forces to clear the Germans out of the area north of the Canal and road. To accomplish this, the 502d, assisted by British tanks of the XXX Corps would place its flank on the highway east of Best and drive south to the Canal. To capture the groups of Germans known to be in the Zonsche Forest, the 2d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry would push two smaller forces west and south from Oud Meer, a small lake in the forest. Together these forces would crush the enemy against the Canal. (26)

Major Roy L. Inman, Commander of the 2d Battalion, moved the battalion from its reserve position at the south eastern edge of the landing zone west to the woods north of the Oud Meer. At this point the battalion was halted and commanders of Companies F and G were called to the ~~Pat-~~

(24) A-1, p. 56. (25) A-1, p. 59. (26) A-1, p. 60.

Battalion CP to receive the order for carrying out its mission. In the order Major Inman stated that Intelligence had reported a group of Germans, between fifty and five hundred strong, were known to be in the area to be covered. His plan of attack was to deploy Company F along a front with its left flank near the Oud Meer, extending west about fifteen hundred yards. Strong points were to be organized at critical points. This would form a holding force and a base for the attack of Company G.

(27)

Company G was to form in two striking forces and sweep the area between the positions held by Company F and the Canal. The heavy machine gun platoon was to furnish covering fire for Company G as it moved across the eight hundred yard area, near the lake, to the edge of the forest. (See Map #2) (28)

The Company G Commander made arrangements for an additional S.C.R. 300 Radio to be furnished his company. After a brief reconnaissance, the company order was issued to platoon leaders who had been notified to meet at a point north of the lake. (29)

The plan of maneuver was for the 1st platoon, under Lt. Stanley J. Morrison, to move through the right flank of Company F, south to the Canal, thus forming the right half of an enveloping force. The left half of the force was composed by the second and the weapons platoon under the Company Commander. (30)

Since a mortar squad was an organic part of the first platoon no attachment was made to that unit. However, check points were laid out along each route so that supporting

(27) Eye witness, self. (28) Eyewitness, self, and Capt Elie J. Ganier, CO, Co F. (29) Personal knowledge, self. (30) A-1, p. 60.

81mm mortar fire could be called for by either of the enveloping forces in case it was desired. Since the distance between the two forces would likely be beyond the range of the SCR 500 Radio, the SCR 300 that had been secured from Battalion was given to the 1st platoon. (31)

The heavy machine guns of Headquarters Company moved to their position and the two groups of Company G moved to their respective lines of departure. At 1400 hours, under cover of heavy machine gun fire, both forces moved off in attack. (32)

The left half of the enveloping force reached the edge of the forest without encountering fire. The woods was so dense that it necessitated the movement of the unit in one file on either side of the fire break that led through the forest. Flank guards could operate only a few yards off the trail and still maintain contact with the unit. (33)

This force advanced to a point about 500 yards from the Canal at which point the leading elements came under heavy machine gun fire and some rifle fire. This was apparently coming from an area immediately in front of a cross trail. The Company Commander called for two company machine guns to be brought up. Sensing that this was a road block, he planned to have one rifle squad and the machine guns to form a base of fire. The remaining two rifle squads were to be used to flank the German positions, with one to move in from the east and the other from the west. The order for this move was issued to Lt. Frank

(31) Personal knowledge, self. (32) A-1, p. 60. (33) Eye witness, self.

Hibbard, commander of the 2d platoon. (34)

In spite of the denseness of the woods, the flanking squads moved through in good order. When the cross trail was hit each squad turned into the center, quickly closing in on the enemy force, thus striking the positions from the rear. The strong point was reduced without casualties to Company G. (35)

As a result of this action two enemy had been killed, several had been wounded, and twenty-four prisoners were taken. (36)

Having knocked out this position, the units were reorganized, a report was made to Colonel Inman, and the move was continued to the Canal. Here several additional prisoners were taken. (37)

The force turned west along the Canal and came upon several large buildings in a clearing, the company objective. The 2d platoon was broken into smaller units to comb through these. This brought about a second series of captures. The majority of the prisoners were fleeing from the infantry-tank attack of the 502d farther west. (38)

The other wing of the Company G dragnet, the 1st platoon, under Lt. Morrison, was stopped almost immediately by enemy small arms fire when it crossed the line of departure. The platoon deployed and placed all available fire on the enemy positions. The Germans were forced back. The platoon moved along the designated route. It still received sporadic fire but no resistance was encountered sufficient to check its advance. The company was joined in the western edge of the clearing on the Canal. (39)

With the company together, the commander organized a

(34) Eye witness, self. (35) A-1, p. 61. (36, 37) Personal knowledge, self. (38) A-1, p. 62. (39) Statement of Lt Morrison and men to self.

perimeter. The Germans were apparently so disorganized that it was thought safe to send out small groups to more thoroughly comb the area. One prisoner was sent ahead of each group to call to his comrades to surrender. With several rifles at his back, the German felt it expedient to carry out this order. Prisoners were being brought in so frequently that it was impossible to spare enough men to send them to the rear. Therefore, a small PW cage was set up within the company perimeter where the prisoners were searched for weapons as they were brought in. (40)

About dusk, the company rejoined the battalion. As a result of the afternoons action a hundred and fifty-nine prisoners were taken without a casualty to Company G. (41)

D plus 3, 20 September, Company G was called upon to perform a mission similar to that of the previous day. This time it was to move west from the clearing on the Canal, through the remainder of the forest to contact the 502d Parachute Infantry. This unit had set up defensive positions in the western edge of the forest, facing Best, upon completion of its mission the previous day. (42)

To accomplish this mission, the Company Commander issued orders for the same plan of maneuver as that used the previous day, 19 September. One rifle platoon with the weapons platoon moved along the firebreak generally paralleling the Canal and about four hundred yards to the north. The remaining rifle platoon proceeded along the firebreak about three hundred yards north of the left element. Each wing of the force was organized into small groups to comb the area to its flank. (43)

Proceeding in this manner, Company G moved about two

(40, 41) A-1, p. 62. (42, 43) Personal knowledge, self.

kilometers through the forest without meeting enemy resistance or taking prisoners. Contact was made with the 502d during mid afternoon. Shortly after this a message was received from Colonel Inman to return the company to the clearing from which the move had started. The company was formed in a column of platoons and quickly reached the clearing. (44)

Colonel Inman issued orders for the battalion to take up a defensive position. This position was to face west and extend from the Canal generally north along the small dike which ran through the clearing. The right flank of the battalion was to be near the edge of landing zone "W". (45)

The sector for Company G was to extend from the Canal north for thirteen hundred meters where it would join the left flank of Company F. Company F was assigned the remainder of the battalion sector. (46)

One of the major problems of a company commander was the organization of the front with adequate strength and still have support sufficient to cope with even a minor break through. In this case both rifle platoons were placed on line with the machine guns of the weapons platoon, placed to cover the most likely avenue of approach. It was impossible for these two guns to lay the final protective fires across the entire company front. This protective fire was arranged for by having BAR's so placed that they would accomplish a greater part of this mission. The basics of Company Headquarters were organized as the reserve under Lt. Al Regenburg, the Company Executive Officer. (47)

(44, 45, 46) Personal knowledge, self. (47) Personal knowledge, self. Statement Lt. Al Regenburg, Co. Executive O.

The organization of this position was completed near dark and held without incident until the morning of D plus 5, 22 September.

THE ACTION NEAR VEGHEL

The pattern of the German actions which characterized the first fifteen days of fighting in this section could be clearly seen. Apparently the enemy had insufficient troops to force a decisive action. With many small forces, he hit the corridor at several points almost simultaneously. If an action was not almost immediately successful, the units were withdrawn to strike again at another point.

However, the German build up of troops along the corridor was increasing each day. Thus far, elements of the following enemy units had been identified as being in the Division area: 107th Panzer Grenadiers, the 280th Assault Gun Brigade, the 347th Infantry and the 59th Infantry. (48)

With the aid of the Dutch underground, the Division G-2 was aided in keeping abreast of the enemy build up and regrouping. With this knowledge, the Division Commander was able in many instances to shift his own forces to counter enemy threats. (49)

The advance of the British units on the flanks of the corridor made it possible to withdraw units of the 101st Division from Eindhoven and other points. These troops were used to strengthen some positions and to occupy others that heretofore had been unguarded because of the extended front.

The Dutch reported large numbers of troops to the east and west of the Corridor. Anticipating an attack near Uden and Veghel, General Maxwell Taylor ordered the 506th Para-

(48) A-1, p. 125, 126. (49) A-1, p. 126.

chute Regiment moved to Uden, where no troops had been before, and the 327th Glider Infantry moved to Veghel to strengthen its defenses. The defense of Veghel was placed under the command of General Anthony B. McAuliffe. (50)

The 327th Glider Infantry passed the IP at 1000 hours on its move to Veghel. When the column reached St. Oedenrode, Colonel Joseph Harper, the Regimental Commander, learned that the attack on Veghel had already materialized. All available regimental transportation was gathered in which two companies of the 3d Battalion and other regimental troops were rushed to Veghel where they were committed. The 2d Battalion arrived in Veghel about an hour before dark and was ordered into reserve in the town. Their position was a large open area adjacent to the main Church of the town. (51)

As the battalion moved through the streets of Veghel, it was noticed that the natives were moving off the streets and seeking shelter. Soon after Company G, the leading unit of the battalion, reached the area an enemy artillery barrage was laid on the area and streets occupied by most of the battalion. The barrage continued for approximately thirty minutes. It is believed by the writer that due to lack of observation from outside the town and the intensity of the fire, an enemy artillery observer had infiltrated to that vicinity and was directing the fire. (52)

Due to the movement of small groups from the area, the battalion was scattered, but under cover of darkness, it was assembled and moved to a new area on the southwestern edge of town. Here a report was received from the platoons of Company G, and it was learned that twenty-one casualties in that company alone had resulted from the shelling. (53)

(50) A-1, p. 127, 129. (51) A-1, p. 129. (52) A-1, p. 132.
(53) Personal knowledge, self.

During the day the Germans had made attacks on Veghel from the north, the east, and southeast. The corridor was cut early between Veghel and Uden. However, it was reported reopened on 23 September.

D PLUS 6, 23 SEPTEMBER

During the morning and early afternoon of 23 September the men of Company G had an opportunity to thoroughly clean their weapons. The Company Commander reorganized the company. All the basics were required to fill vacancies caused by casualties in the platoons. (54)

The Germans again made several attacks on Veghel. One of these came from the southeast against elements of the 501st Parachute Infantry. Part of this action could be seen by the men of Company G from their reserve position. (55)

Shortly after 1615 hours, 23 September, a message was received from Battalion Headquarters to alert the company for a mission and for the Company Commander to report to the CP for orders. The Commander of Company G met with other unit commanders at the Battalion CP about 1630 hours. At 1645 hours, the Battalion Commander returned from 327th Regimental CP and issued his orders. (56)

The enemy situation was vague. Our own troops held a perimeter on the outskirts of Veghel.

The Battalion was to attack in a column of companies, moving from its position west, to a point about six hundred yards south of Veghel. Here the battalion would strike astride the road running east past Veghel and advance to an objective on the right flank of units of the 501st Parachute Infantry astride the road to Exp. This was the area from

(54) Personal knowledge, self. (55) A-1, p. 135. (56) Eye witness, self.

which the Germans had made an attack the previous day and again that morning. The following morning, the battalion was to continue the attack to Erp to drive out any enemy and capture the bridges on the roads leading through Erp to Veghel. Company G was to be the reserve company for the initial operation and send out patrols to protect the right flank of the battalion. (57)

It was previously stated the Battalion Commander arrived from the regiment at 1645 hours. Five minutes were required for the issuing of his order. The battalion was to cross the line of departure at 1700. This allowed ten minutes for the issuance of orders to companies, forming the battalion and moving to the line of departure. It was accomplished only by issuing the company orders while on the move.

The objective to the right of the 501st was reached with the battalion receiving only occasional sniper fire on the way.

The following morning, 24 September, the battalion moved out in a column of companies to capture its final objective, the town of Erp. Company G formed the advance guard. The objective was taken without resistance around noon. Soon thereafter, the battalion was relieved by a British unit and the battalion was ordered to return to Veghel. (58)

THE SITUATION AT VEGHEL

The Germans for the past three days had made strong attacks on Veghel. One group had moved across the relatively unprotected road in between St. Odenrode and Veghel. To reopen this corridor required until D plus 9, 26 September.

(57) Personal knowledge, self. (58) Personal knowledge, self. A-1, p. 138.

In the meantime, the Germans continued their attacks on the town itself, mainly on the north western part of the perimeter. (59)

From D plus 7, 24 September, until D plus 19, 5 October, the company was part of the forces shifted and employed to cope with the changing enemy situation. However, during this time, there was no enemy contact of any importance. Two successive defensive positions on the northern perimeter were held for several days. One reconnaissance in force was made from the perimeter northwest, between the Aa River and the Williams Vaart Canal, for a distance of about two kilometers without enemy contact. After about two days in a rest area in Veghel, the battalion was moved to the northwest about seven kilometers where it relieved other units of the Division. After two days here, the battalion was relieved and moved to Eerde about three kilometers west of Veghel, where it was placed in reserve. (60)

This period was characterized by a gradual lessening of German pressure and a withdrawal of enemy forces. As British units advanced on the flank of the corridor, units of the 101st Airborne Division were relieved. These were sent further north to strengthen the other defenses.

THE BATTLE OF THE "ISLAND"

About fifteen kilometers northeast of Nijmegen, the Rijn River divides, forming the Waal and the Neder Rijn Rivers. These run generally west for roughly seventy-five kilometers where they rejoin, thus forming an island which ranges in width from four to fifteen kilometers. The protection of the western Allied sector on this island was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. The Division left

(59) A-1, p. 152. (60) Eye witness, self, Capt James F. Adams, Hq Co, 2d Bn.

flank was to be located in the vicinity of Dodewaard. The line would run north across the narrow waist of the island to Opheusden, then east, paralleling the Neder Rijn to the vicinity of Drrel. This gave about ten miles of front to a Division which had suffered twenty three hundred casualties without receiving replacements. (61)

The 506th Parachute Infantry was moved to the island on D plus 16, 2 October. The following day, this regiment relieved a British unit that was holding the sector across the island from Dodewaard to Opheusden. (62)

Unknown to either the British or the 101st Division, the Germans had reconstituted the 363d Division and sent it to the vicinity of Arnhem. This division was moved to Rhenen and given the mission of crossing the Neder Rijn and attacking east to cut off "scattered Airborne units" that were defending the area. Due to the fact that the bridge at Rhenen was blown, the 363d Division was ferried across the river and committed in a piecemeal fashion. (63)

On 2 October, D plus 16, units of the German 363d Division launched attacks on positions held by the 506th Parachute Infantry. These attacks grew progressively stronger for several days until the afternoon of 6 October, D plus 19, the 506th was driven from its positions in Opheusden and vicinity. (64)

From its position near Eerde, the 2d Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry was moved to the Island on 6 October with the original mission of relieving additional British units in the vicinity of Elst at dark. The Commander of Company G with his platoon leaders made a reconnaissance of the area to be taken over and made the coordination with the British unit for its relief. Orders were issued to the

(61) A-1, p. 158. (62) A-1, p. 174. (63) A-1, p. 176, 184.
(64) A-1, p. 178.

platoon leaders for this operation but it never materialized.

(65)

The situation at Opheusden caused a change in plans. The 2d Battalion was relieved from its mission at Elst and ordered to form the left wing of a force that was to encircle and pinch off the enemy salient in the 506th lines. These orders were received just prior to darkness. The Battalion was formed and the march to Hein was started. The march was made without previous reconnaissance or guide, through an area in which the enemy situation was uncertain. The battalion arrived in Hein about 0300, 7 October, where it took up a perimeter defense until dawn. (66)

Early on the morning of 7 October, the Battalion Commander assembled the Company Commanders and issued orders for the battalion to attack in a column of companies with Company G leading. The direction was north astride the *road* ~~road~~ *Hemmen Dodewaard* ~~Herman~~ Bodewaard railroad station. The mission was to clear the Germans from this area and continue the attack to the north. (67)

The Commander of Company G ordered the company to attack in a column of platoons, with the 1st platoon leading, followed by the machine gun section, the mortar section and the 2d platoon in that sequence. The 1st platoon was to clear the buildings along the road until it reached the railroad where it would reorganize and be prepared to continue the attack on order. The 2d platoon was to be prepared to assist the 1st platoon or take over its mission.

(See Map #4) (68)

#(4) The terrain in this area was extremely flat and low which required a network of drainage ditches which led in-

(65) A-1, p. 180, 184. (66) A-1, p. 183. Eye witness, self. Captain James F. Adams, CO, Hq Co, 2d Bn. (67) Eye witness, self. Capt James F. Adams, CO, Hq Co, 2d Bn. (68) Eye witness, self.

to small canals. Numerous orchards dotted the area. The road leading from Hein to the Hemmen Bodewaard Station was open on the western side and flanked on the east by orchards for about half the distance. Here the orchards joined a row of houses built on either side of the road for the remainder of the distance to the station.

As the 1st platoon started its move, it became evident that the entire area was under German observation. An intense artillery barrage was placed on that vicinity. Six men of the first platoon were killed or wounded. To continue along that route would have necessitated movement across several hundred yards of open terrain. The Commander of Company G requested and received permission to swing to the right and around through the orchards to the east in order to by pass this area. The 2d platoon was ordered to take over the mission of the 1st platoon and advance along the new route. The 1st platoon reverted to a support role.

The attack continued under light artillery fire, however the unit movements could not be observed. At the point where the orchards joined the built-up area, the platoon began receiving sniper fire. The squads deployed and combed through the buildings to the railroad. In this action about twenty prisoners were taken. (69)

The commander reported this progress to the Battalion Commander, who ordered the company to organize and hold a position along the railroad extending west from the road crossing for eight hundred meters. Company E was placed on the left flank and Company F held in battalion reserve. (70)

Later, on 7 October, the enemy salient was reduced. Company E was placed on the new line, facing west and along

(69) Eye witness, self. (70) Personal knowledge, statement Capt James F. Adams.

a road crossing the railroad about one kilometer west of the railroad station. Companies F and G were held in reserve. (71)

During the day, the 506th Parachute Infantry was relieved and the sector between the rivers given to the 327th Glider Infantry. The 1st Battalion was placed from Company E left to the Neder Rijn and the 3d Battalion from the right flank of Company E to the Waal. Companies F and G remained in Regimental Reserve. (72)

So far during this campaign Company G had suffered nearly seventy-five casualties. This left the strength of about ninety men in the company. Each of the two rifle platoons had been reduced to an average of seven men per rifle squad, and four men in the mortar squad. The strength of the weapons platoon and the rocket launcher section was about twenty-seven men.

The extended front coupled with the greatly reduced strength of the regiment posed an unusually difficult problem for all regimental and smaller unit commanders. The mission of the German 363d Division had been learned from PW's. That mission was the cutting off and destroying the Allied forces in the sector held by the regiment.

To assist the 327th Glider Infantry in its mission of holding the sector from Dodewaard to Opheusden, the 377th Field Artillery, the 116th Royal Artillery (British), and the 61st Recce (British) were placed in support.

To cover the front in strength sufficient to repulse the size of attack that could be expected from an enemy division, it was decided to generally place companies astride roads and other approaches leading into the front, with the gaps in between companies covered by machine gun

(71) Personal knowledge, statement Capt James F. Adams.

(72) Personal knowledge, self. A-1, p. 187.

and artillery fire. These gaps were in several cases larger than five hundred meters. Even with this arrangement it was frequently impossible to maintain sufficient reserves. (73)

Throughout the day and night of D plus 22, 8 October, the Germans used strong combat patrols up to company size and larger to feel out new positions. On 9 October, the German artillery took on a faster tempo. At 1700 hours, it increased still further to a stage which British observers described as the worst since El Alamein. Immediately following the lifting of this barrage, an attack was made, principally against the 1st Battalion, by a force estimated at two regiments supported by tanks from information gained from PW interrogation. In spite of the intensity of the attack, it was repulsed. Even though this failure resulted in heavy losses, the enemy continued to attack throughout the night. (74)

On 10 October, Company G was ordered to relieve Company E. Included in the order was information that had not been available thus far in the campaign. This was information on supporting artillery fires. Prior to this time, much of the fighting from necessity had been supported only by organic mortars of the companies and battalion.

The relief of Company E was to be effected at 2200 that night. The Company Commander with the platoon leaders and platoon Sergeants went forward to study the defense of the position. The two Company Commanders, also, arranged for the coordination of the relief.

The position afforded excellent fields of fire and observation. However, the front was cut by several drain-

(73) Personal knowledge, self. (A-1, p. 189. (74) Personal knowledge, self. A-1, p. 189, 190.

age ditches, a railroad through the center, and a road through the right flank. Between the right flank and the next unit, there was a gap of several hundred yards. The positions were such that both the rifle platoons were required for its coverage. (75)

The Company Commander's orders were that the 1st platoon have its left flank near the railroad and the right flank securing the road and covering the gap to its right.

The 2d platoon was responsible for the approach along the railroad and to tie in with the unit on the left. One machine gun with a BAR was placed with the right platoon, its protective fires to be coordinated with the second machine gun squad and a BAR on the company left. Each of these guns had the additional mission of covering the approaches along the road and the railroad within its sector. A rocket launcher team was placed to cover the tank approach in each platoon area. The platoon mortars were placed in battery with those of the weapons platoon. The company support was composed of the men of Company Headquarters plus two 60mm mortar squads which were assigned this duty as a secondary mission. (76)

At dusk that afternoon as carrying parties were bringing up the food, the company area was shelled. This caused the relief of Company E to be delayed until 2300. However, the occupation was completed by 2330. (77)

At about 0130, 11 October, the security elements of the company were driven in. Soon small arms fire broke out from left and right of the railroad. This fire was directed principally against the left and right flanks of the company.

(75) Personal knowledge, self. (76) Eye witness, self. (77) A-1, p. 191. (77) Eyewitness, self.

Using the information given by the platoon leaders on the enemy location, the Company Commander called for and adjusted artillery fire on the German position. (78)

The fighting grew in intensity. A group of enemy worked behind the squad covering the railroad and opened fire from a flagman's house across the road from the remainder of the 2d platoon.

At this time, the enemy intention became apparent. Using the fire of the two units to the right and left of the railroad, the Germans were to pin down the company. A third force, under cover of this fire, aided by darkness, and using the railroad as a guide, was to move through the company lines.

Lt. Frank Hibbard had the rocket launcher team move over and place fire on the flagman's house, thus reducing this threat. However, another group of enemy, using the same route, had succeeded in getting through the lines. These were taken prisoner by the mortar section which had as its secondary mission the role of rifle support for the company. The fighting continued until dawn at which time the attacking force withdrew.

For the next two days the company remained in this position. During this time small enemy patrols were very active and sporadic artillery and mortar fire was placed on the positions, but no major activity occurred. However, because of the nature of the German activity, it had been necessary to maintain one hundred per cent alert during the hours of darkness and fifty percent during the day.

About 0300, 13 October, Company ~~Ø~~^G was relieved from this position. The reserve area which was southwest of

(78) Eye witness, self. Statement of Lt Frank Hibbard, 2d platoon leader.

Hemmen was reached just at dawn. In spite of the fact that the men had been three consecutive days with little sleep, they were immediately put to work cleaning their weapons. (79)

That morning around 0900 hours, the Company Commander was notified that the 2d Battalion, that night, was to relieve the 3d Battalion in the northern side of the Island. The position to be occupied by Company G was immediately east of the town of Opheusden. The Company Commander with the platoon leaders went forward and made the necessary coordination with the company to be relieved, but it was impossible to reconnoitre the position. The Germans had constant observation from their lines which were in some cases only a hundred yards away. (80)

The terrain in this area was very similar to that of the position the company had just moved from. However, this afforded less cover and any movement made was easily observed. This prevented even the use of platoon runners during the daylight. (81)

The right flank was cut by a large dike and a road. From the right flank to the river, there was about one kilometer of flat, unoccupied grassland reaching to the bank of the Neder Rijn. Between Company G and Company E on the left there was a gap of six hundred meters. (82)

To organize this position, the Company Commander ordered the 1st platoon to cover the relatively narrow front which commanded the approach along both the road and the dike. A rocket launcher team and the attached anti-tank gun were placed to cover these tank approaches. The company light machine gun section was placed on the company right flank

(79, 80) Eye witness, self. A-1, p. 192. (81, 82) Eyewitness, self.

and the attached section of heavy machine guns was placed on the left flank. Each section had the mission of placing coordinated fires across the company front and to protect the open flank. The men of headquarters and the mortar section were again organized as company support. (83)

The positions were occupied at about 2200 hours. Throughout the following day, 14 October, what appeared to be enemy artillery and mortar registration fires were placed on the company position. This was followed by extremely heavy barrages which lasted from 1630 to 1700. During this time the Company Commander requested the British and American forward observers to alert their units. Thus, five battalions of artillery were readied for an attack.

The German artillery was shifted from Company G to a line about two hundred yards to its rear. Immediately following the lifting of the artillery, the Germans attacked across the entire front. A SP gun lay direct fire on the machine guns on the right flank.

The supporting artillery fires were called for and five battalions completely blanketed the front. In spite of this, the enemy worked up through the drainage ditches to points so close to the position that both sides used hand grenades. Here the attack bogged down.

Several minutes later, a new threat developed as the enemy attempted to maneuver a second force through the gap between Company G and Company E. The Company Commander called for the machine gun fires covering this area, and asked that about half the artillery fire be shifted there. The combination of these fires broke up this threat.

A third enemy force attempted to envelope the right

(83) Personal knowledge, self.

flank. The right section of machine guns had been neutralized which necessitated the movement of the company support to help contain this force. Additional artillery fires were requested and placed on this area. (84)

Thus the battle raged until darkness at which time, the Germans withdrew with heavy casualties. From PW interrogation, it was learned that Company G, with a force of less than ninety men and with both flanks exposed, had repulsed an attack of three companies. This was the last major action of the Holland Campaign for Company G. (85)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In studying this operation it becomes evident that the Airborne units had been called on to perform a task for which they were not designed, that of sustained combat over a long period. The original mission of securing the assigned sector of the corridor was accomplished but relief within a normal period could not be effected because of the desperate need for additional troops. To secure the corridor within the allotted period required the most exact planning and aggressive action from the Division Commander to the squad leader.

Of those points which might be criticized the following are the most outstanding: First; the Company Commander, Company G was not informed of, nor did he request information on the plan for glider landings on the LZ. Had this information been secured, glider loadings could have been arranged to give greater tactical unity on landing. Another possibility is that plans could have been made for the company to land in the same general area.

Second: During the first weeks of fighting the companies rarely received information of the enemy that in any

(84) Statement of Officers and Enlisted Men to CO. (Personal knowledge). (85) Eye witness, self. A-1, p. 192.

way assisted in executing a mission. This was a result of the failure of small unit commanders to adequately report such information and of the higher units to pass down that which was known. A result of this was that prior plans for execution of a mission could not be made. A Battalion ^{or} ~~of~~ Company was forced to launch the attack then form the plan of maneuver as the enemy situation was developed.

Third: On several occasions, insufficient time was allowed unit commanders to correctly issue orders before an attack. This resulted in a loss of part of the aggressive spirit.

Fourth: The Germans violated the principal of mass by committing small forces at scattered points. At the beginning of the campaign, the Germans might have been able to defeat the Allied forces in detail if their small forces had been combined for a decisive action at successive objectives.

Fifth: The German planning was considered faulty. The extended deployment of Airborne units along the corridor must have made their mission apparent. The accomplishment of this mission could have been greatly endangered by placing forces across the road at undefended points thus forcing the Airborne units to attack, which requires greater strength. This, also, would serve to weaken the defense of key points by drawing strength away.

To sum up the results of this campaign: Company D had participated in the following types of action; the company in attack, the company as an interior unit in the defense, the company in defense with both flanks exposed, and a reconnaissance in force. During these actions, it had taken a greater number of prisoners than its own initial strength,

and many other enemy had been killed. The company had often been subjected to an extremely heavy barrage, had repulsed the attack of three companies supported by tanks, and by prompt use of artillery fire and shifting support elements had prevented its flank from being turned.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned from this operation are:

First. Surprise is mandatory in vertical envelopment for forces to secure objectives before being attacked by units supported by tanks and artillery.

Second. The mental and physical condition of the men in an Airborne unit must be such that they can bear not only the hardships of the initial action but are prepared to continue combat for long periods. Even though it is intended that the Airborne units be relieved upon the completion of its original mission, experience has proved that circumstances usually dictate their continued use.

Third. Since replacements are not received during combat, each soldier must be proficient with several weapons so that as casualties occur, the maximum fire power and efficiency can be maintained.

Fourth. Organizational Table of Equipment should be such that changes of individual and crew served weapons could be varied to meet requirements of special operations.

Fifth. Opportunity should be given to Airborne units to absorb and train replacements between operations in order to instill individual initiative and an aggressive spirit so essential for this type of combat.

Six. More emphasis should be placed on the training of mortar crews and other battalio crew-served weapons to insure quicker supporting fire. This is especially important since artillery is often not available during the initial

landings.

Seven. Unit reorganization and redistribution of ammunition should be carried out whenever time permits.

Eight. With well trained troops, the aggressiveness and initiative exhibited in executing an action is in direct proportion to the soundness of the plan and their knowledge of the situation and plans.

Nine. Because of heavy casualties among small unit leaders, there should be at least three men qualified and trained for each rating.

Ten. The details of glider landing plans on the LZ are essential to small unit commanders for planning operations at the time of landing, and to prevent confusion.