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AIRBORNE RAIDS

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to present a method by which the commander of an airborne unit of company size or smaller given the mission of conducting an airborne raid may, in conjunction with the staff of the commander directing the raid, plan and execute the operation.

As soon as the company receives a directive to conduct an airborne raid the company commander will normally be called to division or RCT headquarters to participate in the planning for the operation. The scope of this discussion encompasses the necessary planning and execution fundamentals peculiar to this operation and of particular importance to the company commander. It analyses several combat examples which were either successful or failed depending on whether or not the fundamentals as stated herein were followed. No effort will be made to cover all the problems of planning for and conducting an airborne raid as many of the functions such as intelligence and communications will be handled solely by the higher headquarters.

## DISCUSSION

"Another world war will bring the strategy of wide spaces to the fore. Long connected fronts will not exist; we shall have to think as well as talk of everyone being in the front line. The general will share the dangers of the private in the foxhole; battle will swirl round both alike. This means that strategic operations with limited forces will be able to play a foremost role, it may even be a decisive one.

Again, between the major war theatres there will be a wide space for lightning strokes which may overturn a slower-moving adversary. During the last world war general staffs shied away from setting up what they called side-shows; in another they will be looking everywhere for such opportunities if they want to win." (5:189)

This was the fighting philosophy and the theory of warfare as followed by German Major Otto Skorzeny, the man hailed by Allied newspapers during the war as the most feared man in Europe, and by military tribunals after the war as being the German soldier most responsible for prolonging the war. This man during the last twenty months of World War II planned, directed, and led a series of missions which were unparalleled in scope because they aimed at influencing the course not merely of a single battle but of the war. (5:190)

Wide dispersion on the battlefields of tomorrow will open the way for raids by which small groups of men may de-

side great issues utilizing speed, surprise, and improbability as their greatest weapons. Speed and surprise will be obtained to a degree not possible in ground raids mainly through the employment of highly trained volunteers in airborne raids. Only by swift movement of troops by air can the direction and intent of the raid be maintained in secrecy.

What is a raid? "A raid is an attack made to accomplish a specific purpose inside the enemy position without the intention of holding any ground." (2:250) An airborne raid is conceived as the delivery of airborne raiders into hostile territory either on or behind enemy positions for the purpose of destroying or neutralizing enemy forces, installations, facilities, headquarters, or personalities. A planned withdrawal is executed upon completion of the assigned mission and subsequent missions are carried out or evacuation is effected.

Raids are classified as supported and unsupported. The difference lies in whether or not fire support is used. "Supported raids may be made in daylight or darkness. For protection they depend on surprise and the fires of supporting weapons. When the mission requires that the raiding force remain in the hostile position for any length of time, protective fires of supporting weapons usually are needed particularly during the withdrawal. Unsupported raids usually are conducted at night without the fires of supporting weapons and depend primarily on surprise and darkness for protection.

A raid is characterized by the immediate withdrawal of

the raiding force after accomplishing its mission, and by the fact that both flanks of the raiding force are exposed during the conduct of the operation. Flank security is given added importance." (2:250)

Airborne raids have certain favorable characteristics that are at variance with those of normal ground raids. The force has strategic mobility as long as it is in the aircraft and can reach any area within the reach of troop carrier aircraft. This gives the planners a wide latitude in the selection of objectives, affording the possibility of attack into rear areas where there are few fixed defenses, compelling the enemy to disperse his defensive forces and facilities to protect vital installations or personalities. The speed of the aircraft in flight facilitates the initial attainment of surprise by the raiders. The capability of airborne troops to land in either daylight or darkness presents a serious problem to the defender and produces a detrimental effect upon enemy morale. The opportunity usually afforded airborne units to train and rehearse for a specific mission creates another advantage for the raiding force. Intimate knowledge of the most minute details of the operation and of the objective area itself is a characteristic of airborne operations not normally found in ground operations. Ability to land airborne forces directly on or adjacent to objectives must be considered as one of the greatest advantages.

However, an airborne operation has its limitations. Airborne troops require more specialized training and equip-

ment. Adverse weather restricts airborne forces more than other ground forces and curtails air operations which will for all practical purposes restrict airborne operations. Favorable weather is a prerequisite throughout the air movement phase except in a case where helicopters are utilized as weather effects this type aircraft less than fixed-wing aircraft. The inability of the force commander to make a ground reconnaissance of the objective area is a definitely unfavorable characteristic. The fact that the raiding force will be completely surrounded upon arrival in the objective area is not entirely different from a ground raid but the distances involved vary greatly which will limit supporting fires for the airborne force to practically nil unless some tactical air support can be furnished.

The characteristics discussed above will be closely considered by a higher headquarters before designating a raiding force which for the purpose of this discussion will be a company.

The company commander upon arrival at the designated higher headquarters will receive his mission if this has not already taken place and will in co-ordination with the appropriate operations officer commence formulating a detailed plan for the operation. As in all type airborne operations detailed planning is best developed by backward planning from the objective area, to wit, ground tactical plan, landing plan, air movement plan, loading plan. It is well to bring up at this point that concurrent with the development of the various plans alternate plans should be

devised for each phase of the operation in the event unforeseen contingencies occur.

The mission indicates the amount of detail that is required of the ground tactical plan therefore an analysis of the mission is the first step to be taken. This analysis discloses the task or tasks that must be accomplished and their priority. The tactical plan encompasses a plan of maneuver, operation time schedule, withdrawal plan, and alternate plans.

The plan of maneuver provides a scheme for seizing an objective area by assigning objectives, routes to the objective, withdrawal routes, and a task organization. The nature and location of drop zones are important considerations in formulating the plan of maneuver. The objectives selected should further the accomplishment of the mission and be within the capability of the company. While planning the maneuver a thorough personal and map reconnaissance is desirable. However, the commander will normally be restricted mainly to maps and aerial photographs for his selection of routes of advance and withdrawal. There is a remote possibility that he may be able to make an aerial reconnaissance consistent with the availability of aircraft and the depth of the operation. An assembly area should be selected on or near the drop or landing zones and rallying points should also be selected along the routes of advance and withdrawal and near the objective itself. The purpose of an assembly area and a rallying point is to assemble elements of the force which are separated during the airborne phase, the

assault, or which complete their specified missions and are ready to withdraw.

The task organization depends on the nature and types of the tasks assigned. It will usually be composed of an assault party, a support party, and a flank security element. The assault party initially seizes and secures the objective, furnishes protection for the raiding force while on the objective, and covers the withdrawal. The support party accomplishes specific tasks while on the objective such as destruction, capture of prisoners, etc. The security element, a part of the support party, protects the flanks and rear during the assault and furnishes flank and frontal protection during the withdrawal. It also attacks unexpected resistance.

The enemy situation and capabilities, the influence of predicted weather, and visibility should be given consideration in selecting the hour for the landing. It must be recognized that a daylight landing facilitates assembly on the ground but that the advantage of landing at night is that the darkness aids tactical surprise and reduces effectiveness of enemy countering efforts. The depth of the operation is an important consideration with respect to the time of flight of the aircraft to be utilized and the distance of the objective from the drop or landing zone will also exert a great influence in drawing up a time schedule for the operation.

The withdrawal is probably the most difficult and dangerous part of the raid and detailed plans must be made for each phase of the operation. A signal should be agreed

upon which will start the withdrawal of the main force on completion of the mission. The previously selected route or routes of withdrawal should be designated as well as the rallying point or points along the withdrawal route(s). Definite instructions should be planned for the covering force and the flank security elements regarding the time or signal for the withdrawal and the route(s) to be used. Depending on whether the raiding force is to continue on other assigned missions behind enemy lines or to be evacuated, the final rallying point or evacuation point should be designated. Here the force can reorganize for further operations or for evacuation.

If evacuation is to be made by sea plans should be made for eliminating enemy opposition at the embarkation point, co-ordinating naval gunfire and air support if available, and signalling safe entry to the waterborne units evacuating the raiding force. If the evacuation is to be by air a system of mutual recognition and identification is required. Landing zones must be carefully selected to reduce the effectiveness of enemy observation and fire. Planning should provide that all elements of the force be withdrawn simultaneously. Cognizance should be taken of the fact that this might not be possible and in that event the covering force should remain in contact with the enemy and insure the evacuation of the main force. An alternate landing zone must be selected as the covering force will have to be evacuated quickly from another point after breaking contact with the enemy. In the event evacuation by air or sea is

impossible and the force will be isolated behind enemy lines at a distance too great to fight its way back to friendly lines, consideration should be given to moving the force to a location where it can contact friendly guerilla forces. If this is unfeasible and the force will be too large to move without detection through enemy territory it must be broken down into small groups. Leaders should be designated for this purpose and the small groups should infiltrate their way back to friendly lines.

The landing plan will be prepared to support the scheme of maneuver to be employed in accomplishing the raid. It will indicate the order of landing and the time of arrival of the troops at the selected drop or landing zone.

The amount of detail required in the movement plan to insure its successful execution depends on the size of the force and the scope of its operation. This plan will contain the instructions that the platoons and squads need to execute the movement in the desired manner and may include the preparation of a flight plan, an air movement table, an air loading table, and a flight manifest. Convenient forms are available for preparing these tables. (9:147)

The first step in the preparation of the air movement plan is the flight plan which insures that the raiding force arrives at the designated drop or landing zones desired. It prescribes the routes, formation, altitude and speed to be flown, and the means of flight control. This plan will be developed by the troop carrier unit lifting the company and will be based on the company commander's ground

tactical plan. The air movement table is designed to facilitate movement planning. When completed the table will give both the troop carrier unit and the company detailed instructions pertaining to serial information, the number of aircraft allotted, loading, departure and arrival times, departure airfield, and destination. Based on information in the air movement table the company will prepare loading tables so as to insure that the flight serial is organized and loaded in a manner best suited to the mission. Flight manifests will be prepared to serve as a record of personnel by name, rank, and serial number who will be loaded in each aircraft as well as the equipment loaded.

The loading plan is usually developed immediately following the preparation of the air movement plan. The amount of detail is in direct proportion to the size and composition of the force, the experience of the participating personnel, the availability of loading areas, and the completion of the air movement plan on which the loading plan is based. Usually routine loading plans are included in the unit SOP.

Simultaneous with planning for the conduct of the raid the commander should have the company commence training for the specific mission assigned. This training should cover only essential items, since normally the time between receipt of a directive and execution of the operation will be limited. An analysis of the unit mission, the enemy situation, and the terrain in the objective area indicates the problems confronting the company after landing. A training

program is developed for the specific training required by the unit to accomplish the mission. To add realism training areas should be selected that resemble the objective area. If possible mockups are made of the installations, obstacles, landmarks, and enemy defenses in the objective area. All units including platoons and squads receive specialized combat training for the type of fighting their mission requires. This training includes instruction on the use of special items of equipment and enemy vehicles and equipment. Training also is conducted in techniques of the specific air movement, landing, and reorganization after landing. As the detailed plan develops specialized or refresher training is given in the methods or techniques to be used in the impending operation to include packing equipment containers, loading personnel and equipment into aircraft, particularly when the type aircraft made available has not been previously used, conducting parachute drops and assault landings under the anticipated combat conditions, and practice in the use of assembly aids. Lack of equipment, suitable training areas, and security considerations may limit the size of rehearsals or necessitate acceptance of artificial conditions. This training and rehearsal discussed above may or may not be conducted in the marshalling area depending on the amount of time available. (9:63)

"Marshalling is the process by which elements of an airborne force complete final preparations for combat, move to departure air fields, and load aircraft for takeoff. Marshalling begins when elements of the force are sealed and

terminates upon takeoff. Marshalling facilitates a rapid and orderly launching of an airborne operation under conditions of maximum security." (9:64) The division G-4 or the regimental combat team S-4 has primary responsibility for marshalling and will meet the company's requirements for supplies, communications, special equipment, transportation, maintenance, service support, and other logistical assistance. However, due to the short time in the marshalling camp (normally less than forty-eight (48) hours) the company commander must try to complete maximum preparation prior to this time. While in the marshalling camp he will be concerned mainly with final preparations for the raid, the most important of which is briefing. The company commander will plan and conduct the briefing for the company. The dissemination of information will be limited to those who actually require it in performance of their duties and is given to individuals only as soon as it is necessary for the accomplishment of their task. The entire company is briefed on the overall operation plan. Sand tables and aerial photographs should be utilized to a maximum during the briefing to insure that each man is briefed thoroughly as to the details of his assigned task. It is imperative that the commander insure that each individual knows what he is to do and where he is to be every moment that the operation is in progress. As part of the final preparations showdown inspections will be conducted to detect equipment shortages and deficiencies. Personnel services such as currency exchange, religious services, and disposition of

unit and personal funds will be taken care of at this time. Personnel parachutes will be fitted, aerial delivery containers will be prepared, and the issue will take place of rations, ammunition, individual maps, photographs, and escape kits. The final preparation will be the security inspection of personnel for diaries, letters, or other documents which are unauthorized and the submission of required reports. (9:65)

Normally a unit the size of a company or smaller will be marshalled on or adjacent to the departure airfield which will simplify the loading of aircraft and co-ordination with the troop carrier unit concerned. Troops, supplies, and equipment are moved to the aircraft and loaded based on the loading plan as to time required for loading and the time scheduled for takeoff. Certain basic principles must be followed in loading the aircraft. Enough men must be placed in each load to unlash and unload upon arrival at the destination. The unit must be loaded tactically with all individuals carrying their complete combat equipment and with ammunition accompanying each weapon. Key personnel and equipment are distributed throughout several aircraft. Every load is safely balanced and lashed and listed on the flight manifest.

Once the loading has been accomplished and all personnel are in their seats with safety belts fastened at station time, the aircraft will takeoff as scheduled and the show is on.

The air movement from the departure airfield to the

objective area is under the control of the troop carrier commander and is based on the air movement plan. Upon arrival in the objective area the airborne unit is dropped by parachute or air landed, as appropriate, on the designated drop zone or landing zone.

Once on the ground the plan of maneuver is put into effect. The movement to the objective is made as swiftly and stealthily as possible. As mentioned the force is usually organized into three (3) principal elements. Each has a specific task. One eliminates the guards. As surprise is indispensable to insure a successful operation ruses may be used to approach and eliminate any sentries before they can sound an alarm. The use of firearms in this task is forbidden. Following the elimination of guards another element of the force depending on the mission assigned, kills or captures personnel and destroys or carries off material. A third element provides appropriate flank, rear, and frontal protection during the operation and the withdrawal. Often a fourth element may be used in raids to infiltrate into the objective area prior to the raid and their action from within is closely co-ordinated with all phases of the operation.

When the mission is accomplished the planned withdrawal covered by the security elements should be ordered. Often this withdrawal may be in several different directions to frustrate and complicate enemy pursuit. Upon arrival at a previously designated rallying point other assigned missions may be carried out or the force evacuated.

Speed and immediate and undeviating obedience are

absolutely essential in carrying out the ground tactical plan. Should any unforeseen situations occur they should be dealt with swiftly and decisively. In the event it is necessary, previously planned and rehearsed alternate plans must be put into effect to insure the accomplishment of the mission.

The success or failure of the following three (3) airborne raids conducted during World War II attested to the thoroughness with which they were planned, prepared, and conducted.

In the Philippines the Los Banos Raid was carried out by a task force from the 11th Airborne Division. (4:93)

Soon after the Tagatay Ridge operation the Commanding General of the 11th Airborne Division, Major General Joseph Swing, was ordered to prepare plans to rescue some 2,200 Allied internees at Los Banos Internment Camp. The camp was located some twenty (20) miles inside enemy territory and it had become apparent that the Japanese would kill prisoners rather than surrender them to Allied troops. Roughly the plan of attack called for ground forces to infiltrate to the camp during the night of 21-22 February 1945; for a similar force to approach via amphtrac across Lia Laguna de Bay on the morning of 22 February; for a drop of about one hundred (100) paratroopers the same morning immediately adjacent to the camp; and for a battalion to block the Santo Tomas route to prevent a Japanese counter attack. (See Annex A) All of these units were to attack simultaneously with the paratroopers seizing the camp and evacuating the internees

by amphtrac. The attack took the Japanese guarding the camp completely by surprise. The rescue of 2,147 internees was completed by 1500 hours that day. Japanese casualties were 243 killed compared to our own losses of 2 KIA and 4 WIA.

The complete success of the Los Banos Raid attested to its detailed planning and execution and demonstrated the desirability and practicability of quickly placing a fighting unit of some force close to an objective in order to swiftly accomplish the primary mission.

Another truly great airborne raid of World War II was the Gran Sasso Operation on 12 September 1943 just four (4) days after the Allied Salerno landing and the Italian surrender. This was the rescue of Mussolini from Italian forces friendly to the Allies by a German force of one hundred and eight (108) men under the command of Captain Otto Skorzeny. (8:91) His mission was given him personally by Hitler: "You, Skorzeny, are going to save my friend. You will avoid no risk. You will succeed - and your success will have a tremendous effect on the course of the war. This is a mission for which you will be answerable to me personally!" (5:42)

At this time Mussolini, who had been arrested in July, was held captive in the Hotel Campo Imperatore located on a crag six thousand feet up the side of the Gran Sasso, the loftiest peak in the Appenines. The only means of reaching the hotel was by way of a funicular, a cable railway, which connected the hotel and the valley. The area was sealed off by a battalion of Italian Carabinieri with a force of

two hundred and fifty (250) billeted in the hotel itself. A ground attack was out of the question as it would have taken at least a division and no divisions could be spared at that time. Also it was believed that Mussolini would be killed by his captors before the Germans could reach the prisoner, if they ever did. Therefore there was only one avenue of approach left - a vertical assault. (See Annex B)

Due to the small size of the only close landing zone, the rocky shelf on which the hotel stood, and the rarified atmosphere, Skorzeny decided to use gliders for the assault rather than parachutists. His plan was to land twelve (12) gliders with nine (9) man loads on the shelf between the hotel and the upper station of the funicular, and by shock tactics to reach Mussolini within three (3) minutes. Then to rush Mussolini to the bottom of the funicular which was to be secured by a paratroop battalion at exactly the same time as the glider landings above. The paratroopers were to land in the valley the night of the 11th. There were three (3) plans to evacuate Mussolini. Plan A was to launch an "on call" air attack from Rome upon Aquila di Abruzzi Airport located in the valley with three (3) Heinkel aircraft scheduled to land immediately after the air attack amidst the confusion resulting from the air attack. Mussolini would be loaded aboard the Heinkel and transported to Rome. Plan B was to have a single light aircraft land in the valley near the lower station of the funicular and evacuate Mussolini. Plan C was for a tiny spotter plane to land on the same ledge as the gliders and pick up Mussolini.

Skorzeny's operation was simplicity itself and the cue to the entire operation was timing.

The parachute force to secure the valley end of the funicular left on schedule the night of the 11th. The departure of the glider force from Practica di Mare Airport located near Rome at 0500 hours the morning of the 12th was delayed by the late arrival of the gliders and towplanes. Therefore the departure time was re-scheduled for 1300 hours which would give an arrival time on the objective of 1400 hours. All troops were loaded by 1230 hours when the field was suddenly bombed by Allied planes. The damage was confined mainly to craters in the runway and the takeoff was made on schedule. Two (2) aircraft ran into craters and never left the ground. The two (2) lead gliders containing the covering force for the ground operation went astray enroute. However seven (7) gliders crash landed on the objective with the aid of parachute brakes with loads more or less intact, but the other glider was smashed to pieces. (See Annex C) Upon landing only twenty (20) yards from the entrance to the hotel the men in Skorzeny's glider dashed into the hotel, up the staircase, and into Mussolini's room where they released him from his captors. This operation took approximately three (3) minutes. The guards had been dumbfounded by the sudden appearance of Skorzeny and his eight (8) men. By the time they had roused themselves the remainder of the glider force had landed and the situation at the hotel was well in hand. The parachute force which had dropped into the valley during the night had seized the

lower station of the funicular as planned. Evacuation plans A and B were abandoned as the aircraft to attack the Aquila di Abruzzi Airport could not be contacted and the light plane which had landed in a meadow near the lower station had damaged its landing gear and could not takeoff. Plan C was then put into effect and the spotter plane landed on the small ledge. A short runway was cleared of rocks by the glider force and the plane took off with Mussolini and Skorzeny aboard bound for Hitler's headquarters at the Wolf's Lair via Rome and Vienna. Skorzeny delivered Mussolini to Hitler on the 13th of September scarcely twenty-four hours after the start of the operation.

The rescue of Mussolini was carried out flawlessly, but why? It was a very simple but well planned and executed operation. Its most outstanding feature - surprise and timing. Skorzeny had estimated that it would take the guards three (3) minutes to respond to the landing of the gliders right at the entrance of the hotel - and he was right.

A third example of a World War II airborne raid was the parachute operation conducted by a small American force in Tunisia, North Africa. (7:181) The mission was the destruction of the railroad bridge some eight to ten miles north of El Djem on the railroad connecting Sfax and Tunis. (See Annex D) On the night of 10 January 1943 the raiding force consisting of thirty (30) men from the 509th Parachute Battalion was to be delivered by parachute on a drop zone located one (1) mile south of the bridge. The air movement

to the objective area was to be in three (3) C-47's, two loaded with personnel, the third with demolitions. The force departed Thelepte Airfield on schedule and to insure an accurate drop in the objective area the final line of flight was north and parallel to the Sfax-Tunis railroad. The drop was made on the premeditated drop zone without incident, but once on the ground the raiders apparently became confused as to their location. Believing they were north of the bridge instead of south, the force turned south and marched several hours until exhausted by the heavy load of demolitions, they moved into an orchard and spent the remainder of the night. At dawn they discovered they were actually only a short distance from El Djem which was garrisoned by a German detachment. Determined to do some damage to the railroad they blew a section of the tracks after which the officer commanding the force broke it into small bands to facilitate escape. Six (6) of the original thirty (30) men reached friendly lines, their mission a failure.

Why did the operation fail? It was proceeding as planned until the force was on the ground which indicated the loading plan, air movement plan, and the landing plan to have been effective. The ground tactical plan? This was not carried out. A weakness must have existed somewhere as to preclude its being followed and it is logical to assume that the weak link was the briefing. Possibly the fact that the force moved south instead of north as planned was due to inexperience on the part of the force commander and the

troops as stated by Colonel Edson Raff, the Commanding Officer of the 509th Parachute Battalion, but the fact remains that each of the thirty men did not know what he was to do or where he was to be every moment that the operation was in progress which is the purpose of a briefing. Why else would they have proceeded blindly away from their objective?

## CONCLUSIONS

(No portion of the sequence of planning, preparation for, and conducting an airborne raid can be omitted or overlooked. Neither is one single part of this sequence more important than any other.) This is born out by the combat examples cited in the discussion. An airborne raid, no matter how small a force executes it or how simple an operation it appears, must be planned, prepared, and executed by following the basic precepts as discussed in this monograph; once the force is airborne it must not turn back. No loose ends can exist. Success of the operation must be assured beforehand.

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