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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION
EAST OF STE. MERE EGLISE, 5-6 JUNE 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of an Assistant G-3)

Type of operation described: AIRBORNE DIVISION
SPEARHEADING THE INVASION OF FORTIFIED COAST

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division, in the Normandy Campaign, from departure from Airdromes in the United Kingdom 5-6 June to organization of the Division for the attack on Carentan on 8 June 1944.

In order to orient the reader properly, it will be necessary to go back to the early part of the year of 1942 and give a short resume of the events that lead up to this operation, which was part of the largest Airborne effort in history up to that time.

Before there was an Airborne Division in the United States Army, the first cross-channel plans had been put down on paper. (1)

The first of these plans, drawn up in the early months of 1942, was operation Roundup. This plan contemplated an invasion date of 1 April 1943 with an emergency date of 15 September 1942. The emergency plan, known as Operation Sledgehammer, was to be put into effect only if the Russian situation became desperate or in the event that the Germans themselves should become critically weakened. Sledgehammer assumed that there would be available in England for the operation four United States parachute battalions and one British parachute brigade. Airborne troops were to be employed in these operations "in assisting the Ground Forces to establish beachheads and to prevent rapid movements of German reinforcements." (2)

Major General William C. Lee, Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division, with General Eisenhower went to London in June 1942 to study the Airborne phase of Roundup. General Lee, after studying Roundup, warned the planners that the available Airborne troops would be

(1) A-7, p. (2) A-1, p.

inadequate to carry out the Airborne mission; and be reported this finding to Major General Mark Clark, then Chief of Staff of Army Ground Forces. His recommendation, that an American Airborne Division and an American parachute brigade be organized, equipped and trained as soon as possible for the Roundup operation, was approved by General Clark. (3)

Meanwhile, another plan was in the making. This plan was Torch, which was successfully carried out as the November 1942 invasion of North Africa. Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair, Commanding General of Army Ground Forces, upon receipt of General Lee's recommendation to General Clark, in order to provide an additional division for use in the Mediterranean Theatre, approved the activation of two Airborne Divisions. In compliance with this directive, the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions were activated on 16 August 1942 at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. (4)

In July 1943, the 82d Airborne Division went into action as part of the first large scale use of Airborne troops by the Allies in Sicily.

In September 1943, while the 101st Airborne Division was making the move from the United States to England, operation Avalanche, the joint American-British invasion of the Italian mainland, was launched.

During the period of these operations in the Mediterranean, planning for a 1944 cross-channel invasion began. The final decision that an invasion of France would be mounted during 1944 was made in May 1943 at a Washington Meeting of President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and the Chiefs of Staff. (5)

The first draft of the Cross-Channel invasion plan emerged in July 1943 with the operation name of Overlord. At the Quebec Conference in Canada, in August 1943, operation Overlord was approved by

(3) A-7, p. (4) A-7, p. (5) A-1, p.

the President, the Prime Minister, and the Chiefs of Staff. (6)

This first draft, as of 15 July 1943, envisioned a landing to be made on the coast of France somewhere between LeHavre at the mouths of the Seine and the Cherbourg Peninsula. Actually, except for the 1944 addition of Utah Beach, this original concept of two main invasion areas, a British beach near Caen and an American beach (later called Omaha) a few miles west, remained unchanged. (7)

Further details of Operation Overlord were worked out during the Cairo and Teheran Conferences of November and December 1943. These details included specific missions, landing areas, aircraft and ship requirements, men, weapons, and equipment. (8)

During the early summer of 1943, several tentative emergency, alternate, and deceptive plans were formed. One of these last, Wadham, was among the amazing deceptions of the war. (9)

Wadham called for the 101st Airborne Division to land at H minus 5 hours on D-Day September 1943 in the vicinity of the airfield at Morlaix, France. Its' mission was to seize and hold the field until relieved by the 28th Infantry Division. It was also to seize communication and port facilities, including canal locks, and was to seize and defend the beachhead in its sector.

Once Wadham got under way it took on every indication of a bona fide operation. Real activities were phased to create the illusion planted with the enemy. A Wadham headquarters was set up, detailed directives were issued to the participating units, invasion craft were assembled and fake craft built and finally, a large number of troops in early September were assembled on the invasion craft. (10)

During this time strenuous, though subtle, efforts were made to assure that the Germans learned of these preparations. Doctored news

(6) A-1, p. (7) A-1, p. (8) A-1, p. (9) A-7, p. (10) A-7, p.
(11) A-7, p.

was allowed to leak out through controlled sources. German reconnaissance planes found it surprisingly easy to photograph certain sections of England, and films of the "invasion" preparation were allowed to fall into German hands. (11)

The fitting of the 101st Airborne Division into the picture began on 20 July when a story was passed through secret channels to the enemy that elements of the 101st Airborne Division had arrived in the United Kingdom--a month before the actual arrival of the advance detail. In August, about the time the detail did arrive there, news was leaked that an airborne division was in England undergoing intensive training. Another story was allowed to escape that the freight yards were filling with gliders arriving from the United States. Hundreds of these gliders were spotted conspicuously over England where they would show up on aerial photographs and practice flights were conducted. (12)

Shortly after the 101st began to arrive in England, Lord Haw Haw broadcasting from Berlin, announced over shortwave the arrival, the location of Division Headquarters at Newbury, and insured General Lee that he and his command were welcome to Europe and would receive a warmer welcome if and when they ever came to the continent. Whether this broadcast was part of the wheels-within-wheels of Wadham or was just good German intelligence was never learned; however, it resulted in a good deal of security instruction being given to the troops. (13)

Wadham, while successful as training for Neptune (Assault phase of Overlord) and as a test of the Allies' resources for making false rumors and indications available to the Germans, failed to reveal much about how the Germans would react to the immediate threat of an invasion. For, ironically, in September when the simulated invasion

(11) A-7, p. (12) A-7, p. (13) A-7, p.

Armada was assembled loaded, and openly displayed, the weather closed down and the many interested German reconnaissance planes were never able to spot it through the overcast. (14)

Still another operation, details or even the existence of which were known to only a very few officers, was worked out down to Battalion and Company levels, and the plans were held in a standby condition. This operation was Rankin which was to be carried out in case of a German surrender before the Normandy invasion, a possibility due to a military disaster on the Russian front, a German internal collapse, or both. (15)

As the only Airborne Division available in England in February 1944, the 101st figured prominently in Rankin. In early January the Division Staff was ordered to prepare a detailed plan for the seizure of the French port of LeHavre and the adjacent air fields of LeHavre--Octeville, St. Vigor and St. Valery-en-Caux. For this airborne operation the entire available allied air lift would be used. Once LeHavre was secured the First U. S. Army would come ashore there and proceed to fan out and begin the seizure and occupation of what had been agreed upon as the American section of Hitler held Europe.

In December 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force with the mission of crossing the English Channel and destroying the German Armies in western Europe. (16)

When he had familiarized himself with the plan for operation Overlord, General Eisenhower was concerned about the size of the invasion force and the width of the invasion beaches; he felt both should be increased. In January, to allow for these increases, another beach, Utah, 15 miles north of Omaha and the nearest beachhead to Cherbourg,

(14) A-7, p. (15) A-7, p. (16) A-7, p.

was added. Utah beach presented certain disadvantages; it was separated from Omaha by the Carentan Estuary with the Vire and Douve Rivers to be crossed in order to link-up the beaches and behind the beach itself was a flooded area which would present an obstacle to the advance of the troops from the beach inland. This latter terrain factor was one of the things which made Utah Beach a textbook setup for the employment of airborne troops. (17)

The Parachute Drop and Glider Landing Zones, chosen for the 101st Airborne Division's landing in France coincided very closely with a prophetic book, "Paratroops", published in early 1943 by Major F. O. Mickshe, a Czech, then with the Free French in England. A map in "Paratroops" illustrating the employment of three airborne divisions in support of a hypothetical seaborne invasion of Normandy showed the divisions landing in three zones, two of which were almost overlays of the actual D-Day zones and the third only a few miles off. (18)

Neptune, the assault phase of Overlord, called for simultaneous D-Day landings to be made on the American and British beaches. The assault on the American beaches was to be made by the United States First Army on Omaha the V Corps, with the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions, was to attack, on Utah, VII Corps was to send the 4th Infantry Division in by sea. (19)

The 101st Airborne Division was to come in by parachute and glider at about H minus four hours, with the principal mission of knocking out the defenses along the causeways which crossed the inundated areas back of Utah Beach and the margin of land beyond the inundations. The Division had the additional missions of taking the battery of 155mm guns just back of the beach, and of seizing certain crossings both of the Merderet River which bounded the beachhead area on the west and of the

(17) A-7, p. (18, 19) A-7, Personal knowledge, self.

Douve River which bounded the area to the south. Later the Division was to attack and seize Carenten and was, in general, to be responsible for the security of the southern flank of the beachhead as the VII Corps pushed north to Capture Cherbourg. (20)

The 82d Airborne Division was to land in the vicinity of St. Saveur de Vicomte, more than halfway across the base of the Peninsula, and was to prevent the enemy from moving reinforcements up the western side of the Peninsula from the south. The two divisions were to eventually effect a pincher, thereby cutting the Peninsula at its base. (21)

In February 1944, General Lee had a heart attack and was hospitalized; Brigadier General Don F. Pratt, the Assistant Division Commander, took temporary command. On 4 March it was learned that General Lee would not return to active duty with the division which he had activated, trained, and carried to the edge of combat. On 9 April, he returned to the United States. (22)

Brigadier General Maxwell D. Taylor, former Artillery Commander of the 82d Airborne Division, assumed command of the 101st Airborne Division on 14 March 1944. (23)

A big question always in the background during the winter and spring of planning and preparation was left; how many planes, gliders, and ships would be available to the airborne? The question was settled during the spring when enough planes were made available to enable the parachute elements of that Division along with those of the 101st to drop before H-hour instead the following night or next day, as called for in the first plans. One of the results of this simultaneous drop was a drastic reduction in the number of gliders for the 101st due to assignment to the 82d of the planes which would have been used as tugs. (24)

(20, 21, 22, 23, 24) A-7, Personal knowledge, self.

Less than 10 days before the invasion, 6 June, missions and drop zones for the Division were fixed. The 501st Parachute Infantry, less the 3d Battalion, was to jump with the 3d Battalion of the 506th Parachute Infantry on DZ-D, destroy the railway and highway bridges across the Douve just north of Carentan; seize and secure the nearby Douve River locks.

The 502d Parachute Infantry with the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion attached was to drop on DZ-A, destroy the Battery of 15mm guns, and troop barracks west of St. Martin de Varreville. (25)

The 506th Parachute Infantry, less 3d Battalion, was to jump with 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry on DZ-C, and establish bridgehead south of Douve River, to secure south flank of VII Corps Sector. (26)

During the period the final plans for the Neptune phase of Overlord were taking shape, a series of coordinated preparatory exercises was being conducted in England by the assault forces which were scheduled to invade Hitler's Fortress Europe. (27)

The first of these exercises in which the 101st participated was exercise Beaver, held during a five day period from 27 March through 31 March. Beaver was held on a stretch of coast near the port of Torquay in Devonshire. The Division sector, at Slapton Downs, was 10 miles south of Torquay, was in as many ways as possible a tactical reproduction of Utah Beach in Normandy. (28)

The VII Corps' part of the exercise, carried out under the direction of the Corps Commander, Major General J. Lawton Collins, was the same operation which, in June, was to succeed in Normandy. Spearheading the VII Corps attack in the exercise was the 4th Infantry Division, which came ashore from landing craft at H hour on D-Day, 0900 20 March, to seize the beachhead and cover the landing and advance inland of VII Corps toward an imaginary Cherbourg. Preceding the 4th (25, 26, 27, 28) A-7, Personal knowledge, self.

Infantry Division, at H hours minus 5, the paratroopers of the 101st made a GMC "Jump" behind the beach to clear the way.

Actual aerial and naval bombardment of areas from which all personnel had been cleared preceded the 4th Infantry Divisions landing, and the infantrymen used live ammunition against simulated beach defenders.

Beaver, like the exercises which were to follow and like the real thing, Neptune, was complete with field orders, annexes, maps, overlays, and all the other paraphernalia of a large-scale operation. And, as all such operations seem to the participants, Beaver was mostly confusion to the men of the 101st. Coordination between units of the 101st and other organizations and communications were frequently snarled.

Less than a month later, in the same area, exercise Tiger was staged. In addition to a complete manouever, a Division CPX was conducted.

The 101st Airborne Division's dress rehearsal was exercise Eagle, held on 9-12 May. A month before enough aircraft to enable the Division to carry out such an exercise had been promised by the Air Force; and shortly thereafter General Taylor had submitted the outline of an exercise to which he gave the name Eagle. (29)

General Taylor's objective was to set up a situation which would resemble as closely as possible the Division's part of Neptune. The Airborne troops were to move to the same airfields from which they would later take-off for France. The take-off, drop, and assembly were to follow the Neptune plan. Only the parachute and glider echelons were to take part, which allowed the exercise to be held inland in the nearby Wilts area north of Hungerford and Newbury.

(29) A-7, Personal knowledge, self.

As in Beaver and Tiger, the division mission was to take the causeways leading inland from a simulated Utah Beach, to secure flank objectives and to knock out an enemy gun battery covering the beach. By 29 May, all elements were "sealed" at the departure airfields, and ports. (30)

Airfield and Port assignments are as indicated:

Parachute Echelon

North Witham	Pathfinders
Greenham Common	502d Parachute Inf. (-1st Bn.)
Membury	1st Bn., 502d Parachute Inf. 377th Parachute F.A. Bn.
Uppottery	506th Parachute Inf (-3d Bn.)
Welford	3d Bn., 501st Parachute Inf. Division Hq., Sig, Division Artillery
Merryfield	501st Parachute Inf (-3d Bn.) Co. C, 326th Airborne Engr. Bn.
Exeter	3d Bn., 506th Parachute Inf.

Glider Echelon

Aldermaston	Division Headquarters 101st Airborne Signal Company Battery A & B, 81st Airborne AA AT Bn. Jeeps (Parachute Units)
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Seaborne Echelon

Plymouth	1st Bn., 401st Glider Infantry 326th Airborne Medical Company Division Headquarters
Dartmouth Brixham	327th Glider Infantry 426th Airborne Quartermaster Co. 148 Division vehicles

(30) A-7, Personal knowledge, self.

Cardiff, Wales	321st Glider F.A. Battalion
	907th Glider F.A. Battalion
	326th Airborne Engr. Bn. (-Co. C)
	81st Airborne AA AT Bn. (-Battery A&B)
Swansea, Wales	3808th Quartermaster Trk Co. (Atchd)
Portland	801st Airborne Ordnance Company

Groups of the 50th and 53d wings of the IX Troop Carrier Command were to furnish the pilots, planes, and gliders. (31)

A week before D-Day, the commanding officers of the division learned where their places would be in the great skytrain which would run between England and France during the hours before H hour. First would be the Pathfinders, three serials of three planes each, the first would take off just before midnight and was scheduled to arrive over the DZ at 0049, 6 June. These planes would follow the course which all the paratroop-carrying planes would follow that night. The planes would leave England across the peninsula of land of Portland Bill, fly a little west of south for 57 miles to a marker boat, there make a 90 degree turn to the left and fly south of east for 54 miles, passing over the Channel Islands a little north of Guernsey and Jersey and making land fall on the west side of the Cherbourg Peninsula. From that point it was about 25 miles due east to the 101st drop zones. The entire distance, from the tip of England to the center of the 101st drop zones, was 136 miles; the elapsed time allowed for the Pathfinder planes was 54 minutes, the paratroopers' planes, 58 minutes, and the gliders, 71 minutes. (32)

At 0021 hours the first of 10 serials which were to follow the Pathfinders was to cross Portland Bill; and then for more than two hours the train of C-47s would thunder overhead along a 10 mile wide

(31) A-7, Personal knowledge, self; (32) A-7, self; Statement, Lt. Colonel B. R. Baldwin, Asst A-3, IX TCC, May 1944.

corridor to France. The planes were to cross the Channel in Vs of three plane Vs at 500 feet altitude, climb to 1500 feet as they crossed the French coast, and then slope down to 700 feet for the parachute drop. The 150 mile an hour speed of the flight was to be slowed down to not more than 110 miles per hour for the parachute drops; the pilots were given strict orders to that effect. The pilots were also instructed that evasive action would not be tolerated; that steady formations were to be held; and that if ADZ or LZ was missed on the run-in the plane would turn at the coast and drop its troops on DZ-D, the drop zone nearest the Douve bridges. A six minute interval between the heads of serials was to be maintained.

The gliders were to approach Normandy from a direction opposite that followed by the planes carrying the parachutists. The glider serials were to leave England on the same route followed by the planes, but about 30 miles past Portland Bill, the serial was to make a left turn, go east up the Channel until past the Cherbourg Peninsula, then swing right and come in over Utah Beach from the east. This approach was also the return route of all serials, parachute and glider, once their loads had been dropped. (33)

On the morning of 5 June, all units were notified that the next day was it. This followed a 24 hour postponement due to bad weather. (34)

Geographical Features

The Cherbourg Peninsula is a thumb of Normandy extending up toward southwest England. At the tip is the city of Cherbourg. The three mile wide Utah Beach, on the eastern side of the Cherbourg peninsula curves into the main part of France. To the rear of the beach, starting anywhere from 150 to 1,000 yards from the Channel's edge and extending inland one to two miles was an area whose surface varied from complete saturation to shallow flooding. The dominant terrain feature of the country back

(33) A-7, self; Statement, Lt. Col. B.R. Baldwin, Asst. A-3, IX TCC, May 1944; (34) Statement, Lt. Col. Ray Millner, G-3, 5 June 1944.

of this flooded area was the Douve River which, with its tributary, the Merderet, drains the major part of the Cherbourg Peninsula. The Douve and Merderet flow in a south-easterly direction, merge ten miles inland from Utah Beach, and continue southeast another seven miles to the vicinity of Carentan, the largest town of the lower Peninsula. At Carentan the Douve makes a rounded L turn to the northeast and empties into the English Channel a mile below Utah Beach and between that beach and Omaha Beach. The river itself is tidal up to the Merderet juncture; it is narrow but twenty to forty feet deep. Additional areas along the lower course of the river which are below sea-level at high tide can be flooded by the manipulation of a set of locks at the bend of the Douve, locks built about a hundred years ago to hold back the sea at high tide from these below sea-level bottom lands above the locks.

Crossing the flooded area immediately back of Utah Beach are four parallel roads or built up causeways running from the dry dunes of the beaches to the solid ground inland. Crossing the lower Douve bottomlands is a highway running north out of Carentan to Valogne, half way up the Peninsula, and on from there to Cherbourg. Paralleling this road is a railroad.

From the junction of the Douve and Merderet to the sea there were just five crossings of the river itself. One was the railroad. The railroad ran out of Carentan to the northwest and crossed the Douve two and one-half miles from town. The Valogne highway, running roughly parallel, crossed the Douve about a mile to the west of the railroad. A small tributary joins the Douve here and the river splits and rejoins itself so that the highway crosses four bridges within one and one-half miles of Carentan. The other crossings of the Douve were two wooden bridges three miles down the river, about half-way from Carentan to the sea and between the highway bridges and the wooden bridges, the

locks at La Barquette, which could be crossed on foot.

The area was generally covered to a depth up to 40 miles inland with pasture land, broken into small fields by unusually high hedges, banks, and ditches. Observation was poor, and off-road movement for wheeled vehicles was limited, and in many places tank movements were limited. However, there was excellent concealment from snipers and patrols. Defensive positions dug into these banks afforded protection from tanks and artillery.

The country was broken and irregular in parts with steep hills and narrow valleys at a depth up to twenty five miles inland.

At a depth up to 25 miles, the Normandy highlands run from the northwest to the southeast across the invasion frontage. (35)

Enemy Order of Battle

The known enemy forces on the Cherbourg Peninsula at the end of May 1944 were part of the German Seventh Army commanded by Field Marshal Rommel. Their units were: 709th Infantry Division on the east sector from Cherbourg to the Douve estuary; 352d Infantry Division, from Douve estuary to the Seine estuary; 243d Infantry Division, on west coast, from Cherbourg to Bordeaux; joined in from St. Sauveur de Vicomte, south were the 6th Parachute Regiment and the newly arrived 91st Infantry Division. Rommel had been appointed to this, his first operational command since he left Tunisia, directed by Hitler, in February 1944. The 709th Infantry Division, with an estimated strength of 14,000, had the job of manning most of the coastal defenses along Utah Beach. Between a quarter and a third of their division was believed non-German, including many Russians who for one reason or another had chosen or had been forced to fight in the German Army. These non-German Units were commanded mostly by German officers and non-coms.

(35) Self, Map and photo study April, 1944.

The 243d Infantry Division, whose estimated strength was 6,000-7,000, was assigned the defense of the western shore. (36)

Departure from the United Kingdom

Late in the afternoon of 5 June, General Eisenhower visited the departure airfields in England. The troopers were making last minute checks of their equipment for the 100th time; writing that last letter, small groups speculating on the events of the next few hours, or just catching "bunk fatigue". General Eisenhower visited nearly all the departure airfields, going from plane to plane, talking to the men. (37)

Starting at 2150, 5 June the Pathfinders took off from North Witham. By 2330 hours all of the 6600 of the 101st were airborne in nearly 500 C-47s. In the Channel five thousand ships were moving toward the French coast. At approximately 0015 on 6 June Capt. Frank L. Lillyman, leader of the Pathfinders, left his plane, his stick following him down onto French soil. The invasion was on. Eleven sticks of Pathfinders marked out with lights and radar the three drop zones (DZ's) and one landing zone (LZ). None of these Pathfinder teams were dropped exactly at the predestined points, but in all cases, teams came close enough to carry out their assignment at least in part. DZ-A was marked with both lights and radar at a point approximately one mile north of the intended DZ. On DZ-C, a radar and a single light were put into operation approximately a quarter mile southeast of the planned DZ. On DZ-D the Pathfinders met their roughest going and lost almost half the force assigned there; one radar was put into action about a mile west of the DZ (and, strangely enough, in spite of the absence of lights, received the most accurate drop of any DZ). On glider landing zone E both radar and lights were set up at the previously designated points.

At first, the timing and formations of the main body were remarkably accurate. Following an hour behind the Pathfinders (who had crossed the

(36) Statement, Major Sommerfield, Asst G-2, June 1944; (37) Eyewitness, self.

French coast at 0009) the formation flew through clear weather with good visibility from a full moon. Once over the coast, fog was encountered. The planes took additional interval. Flak began coming up, increasing in intensity as the DZ's were approached. Most of the pilots were as new to combat as the parachutists they carried. Some held their formation, others took evasive action, violating their orders to hold a rigid formation. Later reactions of the parachutists varied with the performance of the plane in which they rode. Jumpmaster reports varied from requests for the same air crew to, "I suggest we fly the planes and let the Air Corps jump". The Troop Carrier Command's losses were relatively light, amounting to 46 planes or 2.8% of the 1,656 night and day sorties flown on D-Day and on D plus 1. By the time "stand in the door" was given the airfleet was so widely dispersed that anything closely approaching the planned drop was out of the question. (38)

The Divisions drop could be inclosed (disregarding a few stray sticks) by a rectangle twenty-five by fifteen miles. Three hundred planes, 70 percent of the lift, landed in an area eight miles square, outlined by Ravenoville, Ste. Mere Eglise, the Carentan-Cherbourg railroad, and the Douve River. Of the fifteen hundred paratroopers who were to land outside this area most were to be killed or captured without contributing directly to the accomplishment of the D-Day mission.

Ground Assembly - France (6 June 1944)

The hours between landing and daylight were hours of loneliness, confusion, danger, and death. The planes had roared over, parachutes lay scattered over the ground, parachutists were crawling toward the ditches and hedgerows. From out of the non-shadows came the sharp, sudden sound of snapping crickets and occasional answering cricks. Each man carried what he had once thought of only as a child's toy; now in the darkness his life depended on whether he could answer the

(38) A-2, A-7

snapping with one of his own. Thus men in strange fields were trying to find their buddies, locate a familiar landmark, get on toward memorized missions. The 101st Airborne Division was working against time; daylight and the approaching invasion craft were moving toward an H hour junction.

Opposition upon hitting the ground varied with the locality but in general was not strong. The enemy made little or no effort to dispatch strong patrols to destroy the parachutists, but stayed in positions and fired indiscriminately. Both small arms and artillery fire was encountered, but due to the general confusion had little effect. Machine guns at important road intersections caused some casualties, but their local protection was poor and most were eliminated in short order. (39)

Due to the extremely wide dispersion, methodical assembly by units was almost out of the question. Commanders gathered up all personnel in the vicinity, regardless of unit and proceeded toward objectives.

D-Day Operations (6 June 1944).

At "H" hour the strength of units on various objectives was as follows: (40)

Elements of Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, Division Signal Company and about forty officers and men from the 3d Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry (a total of about 85) under Colonel Ewell, assembled off DZ-C and proceeded to Pouppeville at daylight and after a sharp skirmish secured the town and causeway number 1 leading from the beach. This action was directed by General Taylor, when at daylight no word or contact had been made with the 506th Parachute (less 3d Battalion) whose mission was to secure causeway numbers 1 and 2. (41)

The enemy resistance at Pouppeville proved to be half-hearted
(39,40) A-7 (41) Statement Lt Colonel Ray Millner, 6 June 1944.

and about 1200 hours, the German commander surrendered the town. The troops were mostly non-Germans from the newly-arrived 91st Infantry Division. The enemy losses were 15 killed, 10 wounded and 38 captured; Colonel Ewell's force lost 6 killed and 12 wounded. (42)

When Pouppeville fell, the approach of the 4th Infantry Division coming inland along the causeway from Utah Beach could be heard; at that time the point was probably less than a mile from the village. Colonel Ewell set up his machineguns covering the causeway and as the German defenders streamed back from the beach, they came under a killing fire. Most of them turned back toward the 4th Division column with their hands lifted in surrender. About 1200 hours troops of the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry, a unit of the 4th Infantry Division passed through and began the attack on St. Marie de Monte. This was the first link up of the seaborne and airborne forces and also the first relief of a unit of the 101st by a unit of the 4th Division. (43)

Colonel Ewell's force then returned to Hiesville, where the Division Command Post began to function at 1800, D-Day, with initial communication limited to messenger and SCR 300 radio. One wire had been laid to the 506th Parachute Infantry, but due to enemy infiltration could not be maintained. (44)

The scattering and confusion of the serial carrying the 506th Parachute Infantry was so bad that only ten of the eight-one planes scheduled to drop their men on DZ-C found the mark. The Regimental Commander, Colonel Robert F. Sink, collected elements of his 1st Battalion (numbering approximately 50) and moved to the nearby village of Coulaville, which was the designated regimental command post. This Battalion had the initial mission of securing the lower causeways. Colonel Sink dispatched the 1st Battalion with the mission of securing number 1

(42) Statement, Lt. Colonel Ray Millner, 6 June 1944; (43) Statement, Colonel Ewell, C.O. 3d Bn., 501st Procht Inf; (44) Personal knowledge, self.

causeway. The battalion marched on the objective, fighting a few skirmishes, to find Colonel Ewell's force in control of the causeway. (45)

Meanwhile, the 2d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, though far from its assigned drop zone, DE-C, was having a comparatively good assembly. Just before dawn, the group more than two hundred strong, moved southward with their objective the lower causeways (numbers 1 and 2). They met early resistance, so that at 1100 hours six hours later they were still north of causeway number 4, the northernmost of the four exits from the beach, near the village of St. Germain de Varreville by the accurate fire of a German Artillery Battery. Company D by-passed causeways 3 and 4 to number 2, reaching it at 1330 and bringing it under control almost without fighting. Capt. Winters of Company E went down to the beach and brought back a group of tanks; brought the artillery battery under fire and destroyed it. (46)

The capture of the northern causeways, numbers 3 and 4, had been assigned to the 502d Parachute Infantry. Within the Regiment the task was detailed to the 3d Battalion. The 2d Battalion, about 12 men strong, proceeded on its mission to knock out the four gun 155mm gun battery, which dominated the northern causeways as well as the beach and the area off shore. There the Battalion commander found a welcome sight-- a totally blasted and unmanned site. The Air Force had done its work thoroughly. (47)

The 3d Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Robert G. Cole, proceeded on his mission of attacking the coastal battery. No contact had been established with Regiment or the 2d Battalion. When he found the gun position bombed out and deserted, he sent one company south to contact

(45, 46, 47) A-7, p.

the 506th Parachute Infantry, one company to take causeway number 4, cleaning out St. Martin de Varreville on the way, Colonel Cole accompanied the third party toward causeway number 3. By 0730 hours the party was in position at number 3, and by 0930 German troops, pushed back by the beach landing forces began retreating inland across the causeways. The well-concealed paratroopers killed about seventy-five Germans without loss to themselves. At 1300 Colonel Cole met the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry at a rendezvous which they had agreed upon some days before leaving England. By nightfall Colonel Cole had collected 250 men, and was ordered into Regimental Reserve near Elosville. (48)

The 2d Battalion of the 502d Parachute Infantry had the job of mopping up position WXYZ, the artillery garrison barracks, and establishing the airborne north flank. Since causeway number 4 ran through the WXYZ Area, the cleanup of this position was an important part of clearing the causeways.

After several hours of severe building to building fighting, the WXYZ Area was cleared.

And so the four beach exits were secured by the 101st Airborne Division's parachutists in ample time to prevent the seaborne troops having to pay a high toll in blood for their use. The 4th Division's spearheading 8th and 22d Infantry Regiments which landed before noon of D-Day suffered a total of twelve fatalities that day; the entire division suffered 197 casualties of whom 60 were men from one artillery battery missing through loss at sea. Over Utah Beach that day came more than 20,000 personnel and 1,700 vehicles. (49)

Colonel Howard R. Johnson, Commanding Officer, 501st Parachute Infantry, by dawn had collected some 150 men, mostly from the 506th Parachute Infantry. This group moved on the Douve River locks at

(48, 49) A-7, p.

La Barquette, found them unguarded and secured them from German attack. Soon, thereafter, the enemy began dropping mortar fire and 88's on the position at the locks. Having no heavy weapons with which to counter this fire, this force would have been wiped out if it stayed. Also to move under observation would have been fatal. Colonel Johnson crawled back to cover to Lieutenant Farrell, who fortunately had retrieved his SCR 609 radio from the drop that morning. He contacted the United States Cruiser Quincy manouvering not far off shore. Five minutes later a salvo of eight inch shells whistled over the locks toward the German positions. The Quincy's German fire slackened at once. (50)

While this shelling was going on, a group of the 3d Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, had captured the two wooden bridges down stream from the lock. Captain Shettle in command of this group, asked Colonel Johnson for some men, as he was being hard pressed. Support could not be furnished, however, a contact patrol was put out toward the bridge position. (51)

Glider Landings, D-Day (6 June 1944)

The first Glider landing took place at 0400, 6 June, on Landing Zone (LZ-E) near Hiesville. The LZ had been marked as planned by the Pathfinders. This serial consisted of fifty-two CG-4A-Waco-Gliders, carrying 148 personnel, Batteries A and B of the 81st Airborne Anti-aircraft Battalion, including sixteen six-pounder (57 mm) Anti-tank guns; 326th Engineers with a small bull-dozer, and 326th Airborne Medical Company personnel. During the day the Medical Company set up its Command Post, in the Chateau Columbieres.

In spite of the ground fire and the inexperience of the pilots in night landings, there were surprisingly small losses, both of personnel and materiel, although many of the gliders were badly wrecked. Five

(50) A-7, p. (51) Statement, Capt. Shettle, June 1944.

men were killed, seventeen injured, and seven missing or captured. Brigadier General Don F. Pratt, the Assistant Division Commander, was killed when his glider over-shot the field and crash-landed. General Pratt was the first American general to lose his life in the invasion. (52)

The second D-Day glider landing was made at 2100 when thirty-two of the large Horsa gliders carrying 165 command, communication, medical personnel and materiel arrived. These were British Gliders and carry twice the payload of the Waco CG-4A Glider. The size of these gliders and the smallness of the fields resulted in considerable loss as the gliders crashed into trees and hedges, and some landed south of the liner in the presence of the enemy. About a third of the personnel were lost, 14 being killed, 30 injured or wounded, and 10 missing or captured. (53)

Operations, D Plus 1 (7 June 1944)

At 0430 hours the 506th Parachute Infantry moved to the south passing through the village of Vierville against stiff resistance and on to St. Come du Mont, which was on the Carentan-Cherbourg highway and less than a mile from the first of the highway bridges into Carentan. (54)

The 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, which had come ashore just after noon, and had bivouacked near the beach that night was attached to the 506th Parachute Infantry for this movement. Orders were issued to wipe out enemy resistance of unknown strength in the vicinity of Le Grosiellier. The Battalion was engaged on this mission when the 506th was held up at St Come de Mont. About 1400 orders were issued to disengage from the enemy at Le Grosiellier and proceeded to Vierville

(52) Eyewitness, Lt. John May, Aide-de-Camp, June 1944; (54) A-7, p.
(53) After action report, June 1944

to reinforce the effort of the 506th. The Battalion could not be withdrawn immediately and did not arrive in the battle area until about 1900. At that time it was decided to hold the attack on St. Come du Mont until dawn the next day. The 1st Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry, had been joined by six Sherman tanks from Utah Beach. Moving behind the tanks, this Battalion fought its way into the village of Beaumont, about halfway to St. Come du Mont. Here they met stiff resistance and were held up. (55)

Orders were issued to the 502d Parachute to proceed on and bivouac in the vicinity of Haute Folie. The regiment (estimated strength about 700) arrived about 1500 hours; at 1800 hours orders were issued to establish a road block in the vicinity of Le Croix Pan to prevent any enemy movement from the south. Also the Regiment was to attack at dawn the following morning to initially prevent any enemy movement from reinforcing the St. Come du Mont garrison. On moving out to establish the road block at 2200, the enemy was found to be in some strength at the designated point. The road block was then established about one thousand yards north of La Croix Pan. (56)

Arrival of Seaborne Echelon D Plus 1 (7 June 1944)

The 327th Glider Infantry had begun landing on Utah Beach on D-Day and by the night of D plus 1 the regiment was completely assembled near Ste. Marie du Mont. (57)

The 321st Glider Field Artillery Battalion landed most of its personnel on Utah Beach on D-Day, but was unable to go into action for several days. Part of the Battalion which crossed the Channel on a converted passenger ship the Susan B. Anthony struck a mine and sank off Omaha Beach. However, the personnel were transferred to other vessels without loss of life and went ashore on Utah Beach on D-Day. (58)

(55) Statement, Lt. Col. Ray C. Allen, Battalion Commander, June 1944; (56, 57, 58) A-7, p

Batteries D, E, and F, of the 81st Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion landed on Utah Beach at H plus 15 minutes. An hour later, these Batteries had sixteen .50 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns set up and protecting the landing. By 1300 the batteries were manning thirty guns on the beach and by the end of D plus 1 were credited with knocking down a Focke-wulf 190 and a Messerschmitt 110. (59)

Resupply

The Division arranged to have one day of Class I, III, V Medical and certain Class II Signal Supplies prestocked at resupply departure fields. The Division Administrative order stated that these stocks were to be available "On Call". Actually, however, on D plus 1, a full parachute resupply serial was flown for the Division on an automatic basis. Approximately forty percent of these supplies were recovered. (60)

Analysis and Criticism

In making a study of this operation it will be seen that the 101st Airborne Division was assigned a most difficult and unique mission. It was given a vertical envelopment mission to land by parachute and glider behind a strongly defended beach to breach these defenses from the rear and secure the flanks from attack on the seaborne elements landing on Utah Beach.

The preparation and orders for carrying out the mission assigned to the 101st Airborne Division were full and complete. Those points in reference thereto which admit of criticism are:

1st: Tables of Organization and Equipment should be flexible enough to allow for adaptation to the particular mission.

2d: Inadequate briefing of troop carrier pilots, in some cases, was a definite factor in the wide dispersal of parachute drop pattern.

3d: Parachute Troops should carry less equipment when dropping in presence of the enemy. Heavy weapons can come in resupply.

Although pre-arranged tactical plans may not be carried out as

(59) Statement, Lt. Col. X. B. Cox, Battalion Commander, June 1944;

(60) A-7, p.

scheduled, the disruptive effect of vertical attack on the enemy compensates for the disorder in their own plans.

Small groups assembled from distances as far as fifteen miles from designated drop zones were able to exert concerted action against a surprised, confused enemy.

Skillful terrain appreciation enabled the Germans to effectively delay the attacker across the Normandy Hedgerow areas.

Tactical Bombing of gun sites, closely timed with the ground attack is of unestimable value to the attacker. This action enables the ground attacker to move on to other missions in a minimum of time.

To sum up the results of this action: The 101st Airborne Division secured the four exits or causeways from the Utah Beach Area, secured important bridges on the Valognes Carentan highway enabling the 4th Infantry Division to land on and cross Utah Beach with a minimum of losses. Although fighting in small groups in the early stages, and in the absence of artillery and almost total absence of heavy weapons, the Division carried out its mission. It fought and decisively defeated elements of four German Divisions. The Division sustained approximately twenty percent losses in killed, wounded, missing and captured.

Lessons

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Surprise is an essential element of a successful attack.
2. Small unit leaders, non-commissioned officers, must be trained in the duties and responsibilities of the next two higher grades. Leaders get killed or dispersed from original formations.
3. In training use of cover and concealment must be constantly stressed.
4. Physical fitness must be an important characteristic of the ground soldier. This applies to all ranks.

5. Joint training in procedures of calling for and adjusting artillery and Naval gun fire is of importance.

6. Proper techniques in the uses of demolitions should be taught all personnel of ground units.

7. Bayonet training should be inspired with the will to close with and kill the enemy.

8. Aggressiveness and initiative as the duty of all officers and non-commissioned officers in instilling their men with the Infantry fighting spirit.