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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY I,
507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY, (82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION)
AT THE FORCING OF THE MERDERET RIVER CAUSEWAY AT
LAFIERE, FRANCE, 9 JUNE 1944.
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of Operation described: PLATOON IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 1st Platoon, Company I, 507th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division, at the forcing of the Merderet River Causeway at LaFiere, France, 9 June 1944, during the Normandy Campaign.

Operation Overlord, the over-all plan for the assault of Europe envisioned simultaneous landings of United States Forces on two beaches on D-Day, 6 June 1944. These assault landings by United States ground forces were to be preceded by airborne landings, by the United States 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions, further inland behind the coastal defenses during the night of 5 - 6 June 1944. The general mission of the combined assault forces was "To seize a lodgement area on the continent from which further operations could be conducted." The mission of the airborne troops was to block the movement of German mobile reserves against the ground assault forces landing on the beaches and attack the coastal defenses from the rear. The airborne phase of the invasion will be referred to as "Operation Neptune." (See Map C) (1)

TRAINING PHASE

To insure success in the conduct of a night airborne operation, training is of paramount importance. Reorganization of their units, after landing, is the immediate factor of concern to all commanders. Parachute jumps were practised and all Pathfinder aids were used to familiarize the men with night assembly procedure. Small unit training was emphasized and squads taught the technique of fighting as separate teams until such time as they would become a part of the main force. Large scale rehearsals then took place on terrain similar to the area to be invaded. War games were held on scaled sand tables for all units down to and including the squads of every outfit, until every man knew not only his own mission but that of his probable neighbors in combat.

(1) A-1, p. 12

EQUIPMENT

All luxury items of equipment were discarded. The greatest danger to airborne troops was tanks; each paratrooper was issued a Gammon grenade, made of composition #2, powerful enough to blow the traction off a tank, and effective against prepared positions. M 7 mines were carried by individuals and bazookas were distributed throughout the flight to insure that plane loads landing in areas remote from the prescribed drop zone would be properly equipped for combat. Individuals were issued impregnated clothing to protect them from gas attack. (2)

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence on both sides was of a superior quality.

On 15 April 1944, The German Command published an excellent handbook entitled "What Every Soldier Should Know About Airborne Troops." The German 243rd Division, with which the 82nd Airborne Division was closely opposed in its first fighting, published a memorandum on 1 May 1944, which discussed airborne attacks, and followed with another memorandum on 15 May 1944 outlining tactics which should be employed in dealing with assaulting airborne troops.

German small unit commanders were improvising and utilizing every anti-airborne means possible. Of these, the best liked by them was "Asparagus," or "Rommelspargel," named for the German Commander in the West. This device consisted of poles about six inches in diameter, eight feet long, placed about seventy-five feet apart at an approximate depth of two feet into the ground. These were then connected by strands of barbed wire running in all directions and booby-trapped with artillery shells and mines. Not content with passive measures of defense, the enemy prepared positions which were connected by narrow trenches so that guns could be brought to bear on all likely landing areas. Artillery and mortar crews had prepared fire data which enabled them to lay concentrations on all likely drop and landing zones. (3)

(2) A-1, p. 12; (3) A-1, p. 14

In mid-May, the Germans moved the 91st Infantry Division into the Cherbourg Peninsula to act as reinforcements against possible airborne landings. To complicate matters further, on the night of our landing -- 5 - 6th June 1944, the Germans were manning all anti-airborne installations and, in one locality, were conducting a realistic field exercise against airborne landings. (4)

Our own intelligence reports placed the German 91st Infantry Division in our proposed landing areas, necessitating ^{the} the drop-zones be moved approximately ten miles to the East. This caused little change in the over-all plan of the units. (5)

At the departure airdrome, every precaution was taken to prevent the enemy from acquiring knowledge of the landing areas, time of drop, and mission of the unit. Barbed wire surrounded the marshalling area which was constantly patrolled, and the entrances to the enclosure were heavily guarded.

From our study of aerial photos of the Merderet River, it appeared to be a narrow stream running clearly through a well defined trench, and the meadows on both sides being reasonably dry and flat. Actually, however, this area had been under water for nearly a year, was as deep as a man's chest, and at LaFiere which was the river crossing, it was approximately six hundred fifty yards from shore to shore. Detailed study of the most recent air photographs of this terrain, taken a few days prior to the invasion, failed to reveal the marsh. Whether this was due to the weeds and grass growing above the surface of the water is not known. (6)

The flight time from the west to the east coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula, along the route to be followed, was twelve minutes. The time of the flight from the west coast to the Drop Zone was seven and one-half minutes.

(4) A-1, p. 10 and 13; (5) A-1, p. 14; (6) A-2, p. 1,2,3;

TERRAIN

The fields of Normandy are small, surrounded by rows of trees and high brushy hedges, around the bases of which earth has been heaped up through the years forming earth parapets from three to ten feet thick, and from three to four feet above ground level. (7)

The terrain analysis of the area in which this action takes place shows it to be of a most irregular nature. From the railroad, westward, it rolls gently for a few hundred yards, then falls sharply to the Merderet River. This is true of a triangle of land bounded by the railroad and the two highways leading into the Manoir de LaFiere; it is also true of the ground bordering both sides of the main road leading down to the river. The ground to the immediate south and east of the Manoir is partly truck garden, partly pasture, and partly orchard. A side road, cutting in through the Manoir, is bounded on the north by several large knolls, criss-crossed by hedge-rows, and on the south by a series of rather large mounds, shaped not unlike the Indian "kitchen middens" of the United States. The area around the Manoir was strongly compartmented with high, box-like, hedge-rows over-run with thorn bushes, limiting observation and penetration. The Manoir de LaFiere itself was a four story house connected to barns by a stone wall about six feet in height. The walls of the building were from three to four feet in thickness. (8)

SITUATION FROM 6TH THRU 8TH JUNE 1944

The 82nd Airborne Division was divided into three Task Forces for the invasion: - -

1. Task Force A - General James Gavin, Commanding, - composed of three Parachute Regiments, 505th, 507th, 508th, and supporting troops.
2. Task Force B - Division Commander General Matthew B. Ridgeway in charge. - To land by glider D plus one.
3. Task Force C - General Howell, Commanding. - The seaborne element of the Division

(7) A-9, p. 86; (8) A-2, p. 21, 22;

The Division landed by parachute and glider on and before D-Day, 6 June 1944, astride the Merderet River to seize, clear, and secure the general area - - Etienville (Pont L'Abbey), Gourbesville, Neuville-Au-Plain, Bandienville. (See Map A) Its mission also included:

- (A) Capture St. Mere Eglise,
- (B) Seize crossing of the Merderet River at Chef Du Pont, LaFiere, and a bridgehead covering them,
- (C) Protect the northwest flank of the VII Corps. (9)

The 507th Parachute Infantry was assigned the area Gourbesville-Renouf. Company I was in 3rd battalion reserve - minus the 1st platoon which was assigned the mission of establishing an outpost at Reigneville, and was to be withdrawn only on battalion order. (See Map A)

The 3rd battalion, 507th, left Barkston Heath Airdrome, England, at 052350 June 1944, flew to the west of the Cherbourg Peninsula, turned east between the Channel Islands and headed for the drop zone. (10)

My plane, #66, crossed the west coast at 060227 June 1944. I estimated that the green light, which was the jump signal, would flash on at 0234 $\frac{5}{8}$ and kept constant check on my watch to be sure I would lead my platoon out at the proper second. About two minutes inland we ran into a thick fog. This fog began to thin out after about four minutes and I strained far forward in the door looking for the "T," the ground signal which the Pathfinder Team should now be flashing. No lights were visible, however, and this factor caused some hesitancy on the part of the pilot to flash the "Go" signal. These few seconds of hesitation caused us to over-shoot the drop zone and land in the marshes on the east side of the Merderet River near a large railroad embankment. This embankment stood out high above the marsh and all the men who landed in the swamp worked their way towards it, almost as though it were a magnet. (11)

The platoon, minus four men, was accounted for at approximately 060330 June. Individuals and small groups were making their way towards known assembly areas without taking measures to recover the equipment bundles which had been dropped in the marsh. This being a problem of prime

(9) A-7, p. 2; (10) A-8; (11) Personal Knowledge; (12) Personal Knowledge

importance, the 1st platoon, I Company, 507th Parachute Infantry proceeded to drag equipment bundles out of the swamp. They were assisted by a Frenchman who had a boat on the marsh. At daylight, the platoon moved out towards the LaFiere causeway and joined forces with Colonel Arthur Maloney, Regimental Executive Officer, 507th Parachute Infantry. (12)

D-Day, 6 June 1944. - - The main body of the 82nd Airborne Division landing on the eastern side of the Merderet River necessitated the completion of a secondary mission, seizing the LaFiere Causeway, before the Division could move west and establish the main line of resistance. During the period the 1st platoon, I Company, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, was retrieving bundles from the marsh, A Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, minus two men, had reorganized and moved out to attack the LaFiere causeway. This assembly and reorganization is the best on record for Operation Neptune. (13)

At the time that Company A, 505th Parachute Infantry, was moving towards its objective, the buildings around the eastern end of the LaFiere causeway, known as the Manoir de LaFiere, were already under attack by a group of approximately 45 men, mainly from 507th Parachute Infantry, under the command of Capt. F. V. Schwartzwalder and Lt. John W. Marr. (14)

These piecemeal attacks failed to dislodge the Germans from the Manoir. A coordinated attack was launched against the position at 1100 hours and the eastern end of the causeway came under American control. A count of enemy dead, wounded, and prisoners, together with a statement by the resident of the Manoir, established the number of enemy who had occupied the position at fifty. (See Map A) (15)

At 060900 June, 1944, 1st Platoon, I Company, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, part of a force of seventy-five men under Colonel Maloney, moved on a wide flanking movement around to the east and south to see if a crossing through the marsh could be discovered somewhere to the eastward of Chef Du Pont. This would enable them to come down the western bank of the Merderet River and secure the approaches to the causeway on the west shore. (See Map A)

(12) Personal Knowledge; (13) A-2, p. 14,15; (14) A-2, p. 19; (15) A-2, p.28 - 31

Twenty minutes after this unit departed, word came that the main crossing southwest of Chef Du Pont was undefended. General Gavin took Lt. Col. Edwin J. Ostberg and another force of approximately seventy-five men, and moved directly down the railroad track to the outskirts of the town. A small German force offered slight resistance and then retired, closely pursued by the paratroopers, towards the causeway. The causeway here was similar to the one at LaFiere, being six feet above the water and approximately six hundred yards from shore to shore. The only protection available to the Germans was foxholes which had been dug at some previous time. From these positions the German soldiers indicated, by their action, that they wished to surrender. Two German soldiers stepped out of their foxholes with upraised hands, denoting surrender, and were promptly shot to death by the American forces. Colonel Maloney and his force^{*} arrived on the scene at this time, and it took the combined forces the remainder of the day to annihilate the German force, at a cost to our own forces of twenty-three dead and forty wounded. (16)

At 061800 June 1944, 1st Platoon, I Company, 507th returned to the area near the eastern end of the LaFiere causeway and went into position for the night. (17)

On the western side of the Merderet River, a force of American paratroopers had been gathered together by Lt. Col. Timmes, 507th Parachute Infantry, at 060700 June 1944, and had attacked Amfreville. The American forces were driven back and forced into a perimeter defense in a large orchard. From this position, a patrol under Lt. Levy worked its way along the hedgerows down to the western end of the causeway. Along the patrol route, another group of the 507th Parachute Infantry, under Lt. Kormylo, were contacted and joined Lt. Levy and his patrol. This group took up positions around the church yard and soon after were joined by a force of forty men and officers, who had worked their way out of the marsh and up the western side of the river from the south. Thus, at 061200 June 1944, both the eastern and western shores of the Merderet Causeway at LaFiere were under American control. (18)

(16) A-2, p. 53, 54; (17) A-2, p. 53, 54; (18) A-2, p. 32;

* THIS FORCE INCLUDED CO 1, 507th INF

At 061345, Capt. Schwartzwalder and Lt. Marr led their group across the causeway and joined forces with Lt. Levy and his force. Capt. Schwartzwalder, being the senior officer present, made his estimate of the situation. He decided that the fight for the bridge was finished and that he would continue to the west, in the direction of Colonel Timmes' force, and complete his original mission. The group of forty men and officers joined him, leaving the western end of the causeway to be defended by Lts. Levy and Kormylo and their patrol. This force totaled ten men and two officers. (19)

Capt. Schwartzwalder and his force had scarcely departed when a German ambulance, which came down a secondary road from the southwest, drove to the middle of the main highway during which time a German soldier was waving a Red Cross flag. The ambulance stopped for a few seconds, turned left on the highway leading to Amfreville, and disappeared. (20)

Three or four minutes later, German artillery began to fall on the church and the western approaches of the causeway. German armor, accompanied by infantry, came down the road from the southwest and drove Levy and his force out of their position back to the orchard, where both Col. Timmes' and Capt. Schwartzwalder's forces were located. (See Map A)

This force remained immobilized, due to German fire, for the next forty-eight hours and played no further part in the fight for the bridge.

On 7 June, the Germans launched a strong counterattack, led by Renault tanks and supported by artillery and mortar barrages, in an effort to regain their positions on the eastern side of the Merderet causeway. The American forces in the area at this time, between the river and the railroad, consisted of approximately 900 men. Only a fraction of this force, about 200, were used to repel the Germans, who retired under a flag of truce, to the western side of the causeway. Casualties were heavy on both sides and two German tanks, which had been knocked out by bazooka fire, were left on the causeway. (21)

(19) A-2, p. 40 and 42; (20) A-2, p. 41; (21) Personal Knowledge

On the night of 7-8 June, Lt. Marr made his way from Col. Timmes' position back to the American side of the Merderet River and reported to Headquarters that he had made the journey over a road which was submerged in one foot of water. He reported this information to General Ridgeway who ordered 1st Bn. 325th Glider Infantry, to make its way across the sunken road back to an orchard north of the German positions and attack at day break. Lt. Marr guided the battalion over the sunken road and into this position. At 080600 June, the battalion moved south to attack the German positions. The Germans had set out numerous alarm devices and these were set off as the American troops approached the German positions. The force was met by automatic weapons and small arms fire and, after severe casualties were sustained, the remnants of the battalion fell back to Col. Timmes' position. Our effort to regain the western end of the causeway by a flank attack had failed, and the only course left open to High Headquarters was to take the causeway by direct assault. (22)

THE FORCING OF THE MERDERET

General Ridgeway ordered Colonel Lewis of the 325th Glider Infantry to attack the causeway on the 9th June 1944 and drive the enemy from the western end thereby securing a bridgehead for the 90th Division. Capt. Bob Rae, in charge of a reinforced company of the 507th, was to lead his force across the causeway (only on order of Gavin through Maloney) if the attack of the 325th faltered or was stopped by the Germans. (23)

I Company, with other elements of the 3rd Bn, 507th, was placed on the right side of the main road leading to the Causeway. The Regimental Commanding Officer (Acting) Colonel Maloney, gave the following order to the Platoon Leader (O'Rourke) Co. I, as he placed his men in position on the bank of the sunken road overlooking the causeway: "O'Rourke, if we have to counterattack, you will lead it - meantime, keep your eyes open and see what you can do." (24)

(22) Personal Knowledge; (23) A-3, p. 2; (24) Personal Knowledge

At 1030, 9 June 1944, the artillery barrage began to fall on the western side of the causeway. This was composed of the 155s of the 345th Battalion, 90th Infantry, tanks of Co. A, 746th Tank Battalion, and Division light artillery. German artillery replied and seemed to be coming from directly across the swamp, and at about a 1000 yard range. However, our own artillery continued to fire at the edge of the western shore and made no effort to fire counter-battery fire. (25)

Co. G, 325th Glider Infantry, with Capt. Sauls as Commanding Officer, was to lead the attack across the causeway. The Company approached the bridge on the main road, where they were screened from observation until they were within 200 yards of the causeway; here the road straightened out and they became subject to direct machine gun fire from across the Merderet. Sauls halted his column and asked a couple of the 507th officers whether or not there was a side road leading into the bridge. The only information they could offer was that they had been taking a beating on this ground for two days. (26)

Sauls reconnoitered to the left and thru the farm buildings and found the side road running at a right angle directly into the causeway. This road had a shoulder-high stone wall screening it from view of the western shore for the last 40 yards leading to the causeway. Capt. Sauls led his company down the side road and placed two platoons behind the wall waiting for 1045 and the jump off. (27) Sauls delayed half a minute after 1045 still waiting for the smoke, which had been promised to screen their charge, but as none was forthcoming, he shouted: "Go" and led off. The platoons deployed along the right and left of the causeway and took off swiftly for the westernside of the bridge, approximately 500 yards away. Safety lay in speed and the men who dashed directly to the far shore made it; the casualties were among those who stopped to look for cover. (28)

(25) A-3, p. 3; (26) A-3, p. 4; (27) A-3, p. 7; (28) A-3, p. 8

Sauls' weapon platoon could not dash across as quickly as the lightly weighted men of the rifle platoons and, as a consequence, many fell victim to the inter-locking fire the Germans were directing towards the causeway. These wounded crawled into the ditch along the sides and the movement lost its initial momentum. (29)

One of the Sherman tanks tried to cross the causeway at this time and exploded one of the American mines, injuring none of the personnel in the tank, but wounding seven men from the weapons platoon. (30) This further bottlenecked the causeway battle and caused the troops who were following Sauls and his men to run practically a hurdle race to make their way across the bridge. (31)

Co. G, after crossing the causeway, took the left sector and fought throughout this area. Co. E, following after them, took the right side of the road with the mission of clearing up the church yard and the north bank of the river. (32)

Co. E then deployed in the area around the church with a strength of approximately 30 men, and with most of their leaders killed or wounded. (33) During this time, about 35 or 40 minutes had elapsed and it was time for F Company, 325th, to cross the river. (34) Their mission was to move up behind the other two companies and mop-up on both sides of the main road so as to establish the center of the bridgehead.

During this time the Commander, General Gavin, had received no information regarding the situation on the western side of the causeway. Smoke, dust, irregularity of firing, disappearance of American forces in the hedge-rows, and, as yet, the non-appearance of any German prisoners at the eastern end of the causeway, made it difficult for him to make a true estimate of the situation. The few manifestations of the battle that were visible suggested that the 325th was recoiling. The forces on the eastern side of the river were being immobilized due to the congestion on the causeway, making it appear that a tactical reverse was being suffered on the far side. (35)

(29) A-3, p. 12; (30) A-3, p. 11; (31) Personal Knowledge; (32) A-3, p. 17
(33) A-3, p. 22; (34) A-3, p. 26; (35) A-3, p. 28

What the Commanding General could not well realize was that the block was thickening at such a rapid rate because the forward position was not developing swiftly enough to absorb even the relatively few men who were making it to the other side. The number of men who can fight along hedge-rows and ditches is comparatively small.

Seeing that a feeling of uncertainty was assailing the elements of the 325th still on the eastern side, and fearing that the bridgehead might be lost, General Gavin ordered Rae to take his company across the bridge. Rae had from 80 to 100 men and pushed out across the bridge, picking up stragglers as he went. They then pushed directly up the main road securing the bridgehead in the center. (36)

After Rae's group had pushed beyond the bridgehead, enemy fire, falling against the eastern shore, began to lessen and it appeared that the action was going well on the other side. However, in the church-yard and on the road to its right, a few men could be seen standing around doing nothing. Apparently, they were leaderless and did not know exactly what to do. At this time, the Platoon Leader of I Company, 1st Platoon, who was on the forward slope of the eastern bank, made an estimate of the situation and, taking S/Sgt. Sweeney Byers with him, went across the bridge to investigate. Moving across the bridge as quickly as possible, and urging stragglers along, he moved into the church-yard. Here, approximately 15 men believed to be from E. Co., 325th Glider Infantry were standing in the road leading north with no plan of action in mind. Their officers had been killed or wounded in the action. They were standing near a fox-hole in which a German had apparently gone insane from shell shock. There was a cover on this fox-hole and an opening only large enough for a man to fire a rifle through. The Platoon Leader walked over, looked in the hole, reached down and lifted the wooden cover off, grabbed the German by the arm, helped him out and directed him back towards the causeway. (37)

As a result of this action, approximately 11 other Germans in the area, who apparently had been observing, stepped out of their fox-holes and surrendered. These Germans were also directed back to the causeway.

(36) Personal Knowledge; (37) Personal Knowledge

The Platoon Leader then organized a patrol and moved north along the road to a group of farm buildings to ascertain the situation in that area. Through an opening between these buildings, a large group of Germans could be seen milling around in the court yard. One shot was fired into this group and immediately the Germans began to wave white rags signifying their desire to surrender. These Germans, approximately 26 in number, were turned over to one of the men in the patrol and, with him, were sent back to the causeway. (38)

At this time, the patrol was deployed around the entrance to the court yard. Another German came running from the farm house and was stopped by the Patrol Leader. He could speak a little English and, upon being questioned, stated that the only other German left in the farm house had been wounded. The Patrol Leader then turned him around and, using him as a shield, ran into the farm house. The rest of the patrol moved into the court yard and kept on the alert for an attack from one of the other buildings. (39)

Inside the farm house was the wounded German, a French woman, and two men dressed in civilian clothes, both of whom were wearing white shirts and dark trousers. The Patrol Leader then moved back out into the court yard and stood beside S/Sgt. Arthur Gentry of the 325th Glider Infantry discussing the situation. At this time a German machine pistol, located in the hedge-row at the far end of the yard, fired on the group causing the death of this Sgt. (40)

The patrol took up positions within the farm buildings and prepared to withstand a counterattack. At this time, reinforcements arrived from a unit of the 325th and the Patrol Leader and his Sgt. returned to their unit which, at this time, was taking up positions in the church-yard in a reserve position. (41)

About one hour later, word was received of a German counterattack. The platoon was committed to the right side of the sector and aided in repelling the enemy action. (42)

(38) Personal Knowledge; (39) Personal Knowledge; (40) Personal Knowledge
(41) Personal Knowledge; (42) Personal Knowledge

ANALYSES AND CRITICISMS

Making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that enough stress was not placed upon factors effecting the airborne landings. Although aerial photos of the area were taken, other measures should have been used which would have furnished more accurate and more detailed knowledge of the terrain - especially information of the hedge-rows.

More careful interrogation of French nationals who had escaped to England might have revealed the actual terrain situation. The Office of Strategic Services should also have had this information available at this time, as certain of their units had been into the Cherbourg Peninsula prior to the drop.

More emphasis should have been placed on the time element factor between the coast line and the drop zone, as it was a known fact that we were dropping into territory strongly garrisoned by enemy troops; and that Pathfinder teams would undoubtedly run into trouble in setting up the lighted "T." It is believed that too much emphasis was placed upon the "T" and not enough on the precision instruments with which the planes were equipped.

Preparation for carrying out the orders assigned to the 507th Parachute Infantry were full and complete except that proper consideration was not given, in advance, to the difficulties of recovering equipment bundles. In an airborne operation, one must rely initially on the supply of ammunition which has been carried into the operation with him in his equipment bundles. More emphasis should have been placed on the recovery of communication and equipment bundles from the swamp and a supply point designated for them.

In the action around the LaFiere bridgehead, if the Senior Officer present had issued specific orders to the Unit Commanders, the bridge would have been in our hands on D-Day and the costly attack on 9 June 1944 could have been avoided.

Colonel Timmes' forces might have been advantageously committed to the action at the western end of the causeway; thus fulfilling part of the unit's mission as well as insuring an adequate force to hold the western end of the bridge. In the position he occupied, he was in no way fulfilling a part of the unit mission.

The needless killing of the German soldiers at Chef Du Pont by Col. Ostberg's forces was costly to the Americans both in time and casualties. This action was also witnessed by enemy forces on the far side of the causeway and the reputation gained by the paratroopers made the Germans reluctant to surrender.

During the German counterattack on D plus 1, although there were approximately 1000 men behind the hedge-rows at the eastern end of the causeway, only a small number - approximately 200 - were committed to repel this counterattack. A better distribution of forces along the ground on the eastern side of the marsh would undoubtedly have caused greater casualties to the German forces and relieved the burden placed upon the few who were defending the bridgehead.

Only one battalion of the 325th Glider Infantry was committed 080600 June 1944 to the flank attack on the German position. If the 325th Regiment had been committed, the attack might have been successful.

There was a definite lack of coordination between our own artillery when the main attack was launched on 9 June 1944. No counter-battery fire was directed against the German artillery, nor was smoke laid on the enemy positions.

With our superior air power, it is possible that a strong air strike against the western end of the causeway and a thorough bombing and strafing of the sunken roads leading away from it would have greatly facilitated our attack.

Personnel from the units holding the eastern side of the causeway should have been used to guide the 325th along the best avenues of approach to the causeway as they had no time for prior reconnaissance.

If unit commanders found it necessary to lead their men in an attack, they should have insured that responsible substitute leaders were far enough to the rear to make certain that all personnel followed through on the attack.

Known mine fields should be removed before friendly tanks are given any type of mission in that area. Members of G Co., 325th G. I. should have been designated to remove mines on the causeway so that our Sherman tanks could advance without danger from our own mines.

The attacking unit should have been equipped with radio communication so that the Commander on the east side of the causeway would have information concerning progress of action at all times.

Small unit commanders should keep abreast of the situation in actions of this type, at all times, as their individual action may swing the balance of favor to our own forces at a critical moment. This was strongly brought out both on the causeway and on the western side when junior officers took charge of small groups of men and completed the unit mission.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. No matter what type of active or passive defensive measures the enemy may undertake, if the weight of the airborne attack is of sufficient magnitude, it will smother all defenses.
2. A continuous, thorough and complete study of all sources of intelligence will greatly aid in the successful completion of an airborne mission.
3. Pathfinder teams should not be relied upon as the sole means of guidance to the drop zone.
4. Adequate communication is vital to the successful conduct of battle.
5. Realistic and comprehensive training is a very essential part of the preparation for combat.

6. Reserves should be located and so disposed that they can be quickly engaged to influence the battle.
7. In an airborne operation, the complete recovery of the ammunition loads is an essential element to success of the mission.
8. Whenever possible, air power should be used to aid the attacking unit.
9. All Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers should be instructed on the methods of registering artillery.
10. Unnecessary killing of the enemy will, frequently, prove costly to a unit in the completion of their mission.
11. Due to the heavy cost in planes, men and materials in the conduct of a night airborne operation, it is believed that airborne operations of the future, of any great magnitude, will be dispatched during the daylight hours.